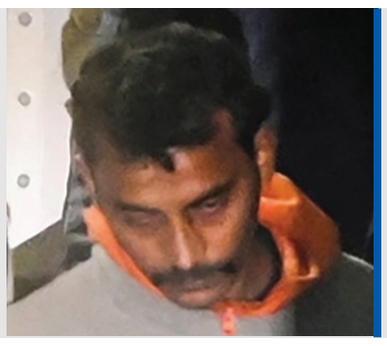
NATION

HC junks WB's plea against lifer to RG Kar rape accused

≫ Page: 5 ≪



BUSINESS

Infosys sacks 700 freshers for not clearing 'internal assessment'

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Lovlina, Ankushita clinch gold; Shiva, Abhinav win silver

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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BSY gets HC anticipatory bail in POCSO

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

The Karnataka High Court has granted anticipatory bail to former Chief Minister and veteran BJP leader BS Yediyurappa, while remitting the criminal case against him back to the trial court. This decision follows Yediyurappa's petition challenging the charges brought under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The 81-year-old politician sought the quashing of a case filed against him after a complaint was lodged on 14 March last year. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Cabinet clears new Income Tax Bill; to be introduced in Parl

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved the New Income Tax bill, which will replace the six decades old IT Act, sources said.

The new bill seeks to make direct tax law simple to understand and not to impose any new tax burden. It will not have provisos and explanations or long sentences.

The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the New Income Tax Bill, sources said.

Sources said the new income tax bill will now be introduced in the Parliament next week and would be sent to Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance.

The first leg of the ongoing budget session ends on 13 February. The session will reconvene on 10 March and sit through 14 April.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced in Budget 2025-26 that the new tax bill will be introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament.

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced in Budget 2025-26 that the new tax bill will be introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament.

Sitharaman had first announced a comprehensive review of the Income-tax Act, 1961 in July 2024 Budget.

The Union Cabinet also approved the continuation and restructuring of central sector scheme 'Skill India Programme' till 2026 with an overlay outlay of Rs 8,800 crore.

Giving details, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 (PMKVY 4.0), the Pradhan Mantri National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS), and the Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme -- the three key components -- are now combined under the composite Central Sector Scheme of "Skill India Programme". The allocation towards PMKVY 4.0 is Rs 6,000 crore, PM-NAPS Rs 1,942 crore and JSS Rs 858 crore. An official release said that the approval underscores the government's commitment to building a skilled, future-ready workforce by integrating demand-driven, technology-enabled, and industry-aligned training across the country. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 7

Nirmala Sitharaman ***PHOTO: PTI***

K'taka HC rejects plea for CBI probe into MUDA case

Snehamayi vows to approach the apex court

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

In a relief to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, the High Court of Karnataka on Friday dismissed a petition filed by RTI activist Snehamayi Krishna seeking a direction to transfer the investigation into the MUDA site allotment case to the CBI.

Siddaramaiah is facing allegations of illegalities in the allotment of 14 sites to his wife Parvathi BM by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA).

Snehamayi Krishna had contended that an impartial investigation is not possible since Siddaramaiah, being the Chief Minister, wields immense power and influence over the state departments.

Justice M Nagaprasanna said, "The material on record on its perusal nowhere indicates that the investigation conducted by the Lokayukta is partisan, lopsided or shoddy for this court to refer the matter to the CBI for further investigation or reinvestigation. In the result the petition would necessarily meet its dismissal and is accordingly dismissed," he said.

The judge said, "The office of the Lokayukta does not suffer from questionable independence, the insulation of the institution from the external influences is already recognised by the apex court and the division bench of this court, as quoted supra."

"There is no malady of the kind that is projected by the apex court present in the case at hand to refer the matter for further investigation or reinvestigation to the hands of the CBI. It is not a panacea to the projected ill," Justice Nagaprasanna said.

Snehamayi to approach SC

Meanwhile, Snehamayi Krishna said he would challenge the HC ruling in the Supreme Court. "It is a setback in my fight, but there is no question of me getting disturbed or going back from my fight. We will continue our fight. We will file an appeal in the Supreme Court and continue our efforts towards handing over the case to CBI," Krishna said.

"Considering the grounds on which the High Court has rejected the petition, we will discuss with our lawyers as to what answer should be given to it along with the necessary documents, we will challenge this verdict in the supreme court, and seek a CBI probe," he said.

"We tried to convince the high court that the Lokayukta police was not conducting an impartial probe against the accused, but we will get to know as to on what grounds the High Court has given the order, based on that we will make our efforts to get the case handed over to CBI for probe," he added. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Delhi gears up for election results today

Police personnel conduct security checks at a counting center on the eve of Delhi election results ***PHOTO: PTI***

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The counting of votes for the Delhi assembly elections will commence tomorrow, determining whether the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) can secure a fourth consecutive term or if the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will reclaim power in the capital after a span of over 26 years. The Congress aims to recover some ground after failing to win a seat in the last two elections.

A dramatic development unfolded outside AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal's residence as officials from the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) arrived to gather information regarding allegations that the BJP attempted to lure AAP candidates away. Following Kejriwal's refusal to meet them, the ACB issued a legal notice seeking evidence of the claims. The situation escalated after Lt Governor VK Saxena announced an inquiry into the accusations.

Counting will begin at 8am across 19 stations throughout the city, with heightened security measures in place including a three-tier system involving 10,000 police personnel. According to exit polls, the BJP appears to have the upper hand, with Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva predicting nearly 50 seats for his party. In contrast, the AAP maintains it will secure a win, with Kejriwal poised to continue as chief minister.

The stakes are high: a victory for AAP would bolster Kejriwal's position nationally, while a BJP win would signal its return to governance in Delhi and end AAP's decade-long dominance. The Congress, historically a major player in the capital, hopes to make a significant comeback after years of setbacks. *—PTI*

Kejriwal says BJP poaching MLAs, gets ACB notice

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Delhi Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) on Friday served a legal notice to AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal, seeking details and evidence regarding his allegations that the BJP attempted to bribe and poach his party's 16 candidates ahead of the Delhi Assembly election results.

The legal notice comes just a day before the counting of votes is scheduled to take place for the Delhi Assembly elections held on 5 February. Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena on Friday ordered an ACB probe into allegations by the AAP leaders that the BJP attempted to poach its candidates. The ACB's notice specifically refers to a post on X by Kejriwal accusing the BJP of offering bribes to 16 AAP candidates to switch sides. It also seeks the names of the 16 candidates who received phone calls, the phone numbers of those who contacted them and proof. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

NEET-UG to be conducted on 4 May

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The medical entrance exam NEET-UG will be conducted on May 4, the National Testing Agency (NTA) announced on Friday. The application process for the the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET)-UG began on Friday and will conclude on March 7. It is the largest entrance exam in the country in terms of the number of candidates appearing for the test. In 2024, a record more than 24 lakh candidates took the exam. The NTA conducts the NEET every year for admission into medical colleges. A total of 1,08,000 seats are available for MBSS course. Approximately 56,000 of them are in government hospitals and about 52,000 in private colleges. *—PTI*

Mumbai reports 1st GBS case, 64-yr-old women hospitalised

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Mumbai has recorded its first case of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), a rare nerve disorder, involving a 64-year-old woman who is currently receiving treatment in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a civic-run hospital. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), led by Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani, confirmed the diagnosis on Friday. The patient, living in Andheri East, was admitted with a history of fever and diarrhoea, which subsequently led to ascending paralysis. GBS occurs when the immune system attacks peripheral nerves, causing muscle weakness and loss of sensation. *—PTI*

Governor rejects microfinance ordinance

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot on Friday rejected Karnataka Micro Finance (Prevention of Coercive Actions) Ordinance 2025, stating that in its current form, the lenders, who are also part of the society, are being done a great injustice.

Siddaramaiah-led Congress government had proposed to regulate microfinance in response to a spate of suicides and multiple complaints from various parts of the state against predatory loan recovery methods used by microfinance firms.

WHAT GEHLOT SAID

The punishment of 10 years imprisonment and Rs 5 lakh fine are excessive Existing laws could have been used by the police dept to control the situation This ordinance is likely to have negative impact on microfinance and this will affect the poor

Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister's Office said the governor cited several reasons for his rejection, such as the punishment of 10 years and fine of Rs 5 lakh is excessive, the existing laws could have been used by the police department to control the situation and the ordinance is likely to have a negative impact on microfinance and this will ultimately affect the poor.

Later, the Raj Bhavan issued a statement, quoting the governor as saying that through the ordinance, the state government is proposing to discharge all loans, including interest, when the ordinance comes into effect and that no civil court shall entertain any proceedings against the borrowers. "But if all the pending loans with interest as on date are discharged, the lawful and genuine lenders may face trouble. Further, they have no remedy to recover their pending amounts," the governor said. He said that as a set principle of natural justice, every person has a right to fight for his rights. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

MEA flags 'mistreatment' of Indian deportees in US

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

India has officially raised concerns with the United States regarding the treatment of illegal Indian immigrants being deported in shackles. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri described the situation, where deportees were handcuffed during a recent 40-hour flight on a military aircraft, as one that could have been avoided.

Misri revealed that there are currently 487 presumed Indian citizens facing removal orders from the US, with details of 298 individuals already shared with Indian authorities. "We make our concerns known to the United States that such treatment can perhaps be avoided," Misri stated, emphasising that India continues to highlight the need for the humane treatment of deportees.

The practice of deporting immigrants in restraints has been in place since 2012. Misri confirmed that no formal protest had been lodged by India regarding this policy since then. He noted that External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had drawn attention to the standard operating procedures of the US authorities in Parliament.

The issue gained further prominence following a recent incident involving the deportation of 104 Indians, which sparked heated discussions within both Parliament and the wider public. Meanwhile, the Enforcement Directorate in India is investigating a complex network of agents facilitating illegal immigration to the US through dubious admissions to Canadian colleges, with an emphasis on tackling the underlying issues of illegal immigration. *—PTI*

MODI TO VISIT US, FRANCE FROM 10-14 FEBRUARY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay a two-day working visit to the US from 12 February during which he will meet President Donald Trump, the external affairs ministry Friday announced. Addressing a press conference, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said Modi's visit will give further impetus and direction to India-US bilateral relationship. Prior to his US visit, Modi will be in France from February 10-12 to co-chair the AI Action Summit with French President Emmanuel Macron. He will also visit Cadarache, the site of International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor of which India is a partner, Misri said. *—PTI*

UNDER NEW GOVERNOR

RBI cuts repo rate by 25bps for 1st time in 5 yrs

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Home, auto and other loans are likely to see a drop in interest rates after the Reserve Bank of India under a new Governor cut the key benchmark rate on Friday for the first time since May 2020 to spur a sluggish economy.

The Monetary Policy Committee, headed by RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, slashed the repo rate by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent and maintained a neutral policy stand.

This is the first revision after two-and-a-half years.

Malhotra, who replaced Shaktikanta Das after the bi-monthly MPC meeting in December, forecast the economy to grow at 6.7 per cent in 2025 while inflation rate to lower to 4.2 per cent while retaining the forecast for 2024-25 at 4.8 per cent.

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, slashed the repo rate by 25 basis points to

6.25 per cent

and maintained a neutral policy stand

For the fiscal year ending 31 March, RBI said the economy will grow at 6.4 per cent, its worst in four years and lower than 6.6 per cent seen previously.

The repo rate (repurchase rate) is the interest rate at which the central bank lends money to commercial banks when there is a shortage of funds. When repo rate is high, borrowing costs for banks increase, which is often passed on to consumers in the form of higher interest rates on loans.

Repo rate also decides the returns on savings and investment products. A higher repo rate can lead to better returns on fixed deposits. On the flip side, lower repo rates might reduce the interest earned on these savings products.

Analysts said with the rupee hitting record lows virtually every day against the US dollar, a rate cut will put pressure on domestic inflation and the currency, likely triggering capital outflows.

Malhotra said food inflation pressures, in absence of any supply side shock, should see a significant softening due to good kharif production, winter-easing in vegetable prices and favourable rabi crop prospects. He further said core inflation is expected to rise but remain moderate. The MPC also noted that though growth is expected to recover from the low of July-September 2024 (when it grew by 5.4 per cent - its slowest expansion in nearly two years), it is much below than that of last year. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 7

India summons B'desh envoy over Hasina's speech tiff

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

India summoned Bangladesh's Acting High Commissioner, Md Nurul Islam to India, following the controversies surrounding former Bangladeshi Prime Minister speech.

The Ministry of External Affairs spokespersons Randhir Jaiswal said, "These statements by Bangladesh are in fact responsible for the persistent negativity between the two nations."

He added that "India desires a positive, constructive and mutually beneficial relationship with Bangladesh." Jaiswal emphasised that the government was not responsible for comments made by Hasina. *—PTI*

K'taka signs MoU with University of Liverpool

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

The Karnataka government has formalised a partnership with the University of Liverpool by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at enhancing collaboration in education and research. The agreement was signed at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's official residence, Cauvery. The MoU seeks to foster advancements in research and innovation, bolster educational cooperation, and establish a joint working group to facilitate the partnership. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, along with Large and Medium Industries Minister M B Patil and Higher Education Minister Dr MC Sudhakar, attended the signing ceremony. The delegation from the University of Liverpool included Vice-Chancellor Professor Tim Jones and Pro-Vice Chancellor Professor Tariq Ali, underlining the commitment to strengthening educational ties between the two. *—PTI*

Six ATM custodians held for Rs 51.7 lakh scam

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

A significant operation against financial misconduct, Mahalakshmi Layout police apprehended six staff members from a cash management firm for allegedly embezzling funds while replenishing ATMs. The suspects include Samir, 26, a cash officer; Manohar, 29, a cash loader; and Girish, 26, among others, all hailing from Laggere. The gang reportedly misappropriated funds over the past two years, depositing only a portion of the cash into ATMs while siphoning off the rest. They also misused ATM passwords to withdraw cash illicitly. Police recovered Rs 51.76 lakh and confiscated three vehicles worth Rs 90 lakh purchased with the stolen money, following a tip-off related to a dispute over the funds. Further investigations revealed their dual roles in both refilling and servicing ATMs. *—Salar News*

Bidar commissioner calls for quick delivery of justice

BIDAR, 7 FEB

Bidar District Commissioner Shilpa Sharma has directed officials to ensure quick delivery of justice by resolving cases related to domestic violence, rape, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, POCSO, child marriage and missing children within the stipulated timeframe. Presiding over a meeting of the women and child development department and the district child welfare and protection committee at the Commissioner's Office, she emphasised the implementation of state and Central government schemes for women and children. District Panchayat Planning Officer Kishore Dubey, Project Director Jagannath Murthy, Child Welfare Committee President Razia Balabatti, Women and Child Development Department Deputy Director MS Sridhar, District Child Protection Officer Gururaj, Taluk-level Child Development Project Officers and representatives from various organisations attended the meeting. *—Salar News*

Sudanese student assaulted, robbed of cash

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Govindapura police are searching for two bike-borne assailants who allegedly robbed a Sudanese student of his cash in the early hours of Friday. The victim, Osama, a Bachelor of Computer Applications (BCA) student at a private college in Bengaluru, was returning from a party around 2am when he was attacked, police said. According to the complaint, Osama was walking on Govindapura Main Road when two men on a motorcycle approached him. They reportedly assaulted him before snatching Rs 4,000 cash. *—Salar News*

HC grants anticipatory bail to BSY in POCSO case

HC remitted the case against him back to the trial court

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

The Karnataka High Court has granted anticipatory bail to former Chief Minister and veteran BJP leader BS Yediyurappa, while remitting the criminal case against him back to the trial court. This decision follows Yediyurappa's petition challenging the charges brought under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The 81-year-old politician sought the quashing of a case filed against him after a complaint was lodged on 14 March last year. The allegation involved the sexual assault of a 17-year-old girl during a meeting at his residence in Dollars Colony on 2 February.

Justice Nagaprasanna, in his ruling, stated, "The writ petition is allowed in part. The order of taking cognisance by the concerned court dated 04-07-2024, concerning accused number 1 (Yediyurappa), stands obliterated." However, he clarified that the crime, investigation, and final report remain intact, and the matter has been remitted to the concerned court for further proceedings.

BJP leader BS Yediyurappa sought the quashing of a case filed against him after a complaint was lodged on 14 March last year *PHOTO: PTI*

The judge noted that none of the arguments presented by the legal representatives for both parties had been addressed, apart from the cognisance order. Yediyurappa may pursue further legal remedies at an appropriate stage.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID), which is investigating the case, has alleged in a charge sheet filed on 27 June last year that Yediyurappa and three aides—Arun YM, Rudresh M, and G Mariswamy—paid money to the victim and her mother to secure their silence. Yediyurappa faces charges under Section 8 of the POCSO Act, and multiple sections of the Indian Penal Code, including those pertaining to sexual harassment and destruction of evidence. *—PTI*

ED CASE IS STILL ON

HC verdict not a clean chit to CM, says Vijayendra

- Siddaramaiah is facing allegations of illegalities in the allotment of 14 sites to his wife Parvathi BM by MUDA.

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Karnataka BJP president BY Vijayendra on Friday said the High Court, by dismissing a petition seeking a direction to transfer the investigation into the MUDA site allotment case to the CBI, has not declared Chief Minister Siddaramaiah as innocent.

Siddaramaiah is facing allegations of illegalities in the allotment of 14 sites to his wife Parvathi B M by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA).

"The High Court has only rejected a petition seeking a CBI probe in the MUDA case. It has not said that the chief minister is innocent. The court has not cleared the CM from the allegations made against him," Vijayendra said. This verdict is in no way a setback for the BJP in its fight, he said, adding, "Both Lokayukta and ED probe is on. Let's wait and see what happens. Once the probe report comes, we will react on the probe's truthfulness." *—PTI*

PROTEST FOR PENSION SCHEME

Karnataka State Government NPS Employees Association members protest demanding the implementation of Old Pension Scheme (OPS) at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Friday. *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

4 Maha Kumbh pilgrims from Belagavi killed in MP accident

BELAGAVI, 7 FEB

After four pilgrims Belagavi were killed in a stampede at the venue of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj last month, four more from the same district were killed and 16 others injured in a road accident on Friday, while returning after taking part in the religious congregation.

A group of 20 pilgrims from the state, of which 16 were from Belagavi, were returning to Indore from Prayagraj in a tempo traveller when the vehicle hit a bike and then rammed into a dumper truck from the rear around 5am.

The accident occurred on Mhow–Khalghat section of the national highway in Indore. Two persons on the bike, both residents of Dhar-Khalghat, were killed on the spot.

One of the pilgrims told the police that the vehicle was descending a slope at a high speed when the accident took place. "Our vehicle hit the other vehicles in a few seconds," the survivor said. District in-charge and Public Works Department Minister Satish Jarkiholi, who is in constant touch with the Madya Pradesh government, said the deceased have been identified as driver Sagar Shahapurkar from Basavanna Galli, Neeta Badamanji from Kranti Nagar, Sangeeta Metri from Shivaji Nagar and Jyoti Khandekar from Vadagavi in Belagavi. Belagavi MP Jagadish Shettar said, "I'm in regular touch with the Madhya Pradesh government." Efforts are on to bring them back to the state without delay, he said. Deputy commissioner Mohammed Roshan said that the district administration is in contact with their counterparts in Indore and getting regular updates. *—Salar News*

Gowda says Naidu eyed NDA top seat; Nadda denies

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

BJP chief JP Nadda has rejected former prime minister HD Deve Gowda's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi disagreed with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's wish to become the vice chairman of the NDA after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Participating in the discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address on Thursday, Gowda said, "Chandrababu Naidu, who supports this government with his 16 members, wanted to become the vice chairman or chairman of the alliance, but Modiji did not agree. He knows how to run the administration." Nadda said, "As the president of the party, I want to clarify that no such discussion happened in the NDA." He said everyone accepted the leadership of Modi. According to Gowda, "In the UPA government, there was not only prime minister but also vice-chairman. But, Modiji has not allowed anyone to handle or meddle with the government." *—PTI*

Stolen phone, tattoo helps cops identify body of notorious thief

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

City police have identified the decomposed body of a man discovered on 24 December last year in the basement of a prominent grocery store in the Konanakunte area. Following an extensive investigation, authorities confirmed the deceased as notorious thief Vishnu Prashanth, a criminal with a history spanning several states.

Prashanth, originally from Kerala, was involved in over 30 theft cases across his home state and Tamil Nadu. He had previously been arrested by the Kerala police and served a year in prison before being released on bail. Fearing re-arrest, he fled to Bengaluru, where he continued his criminal activities.

The investigation began when the body was found in a decomposed state at Brand Fashion Mall near Konanakunte Cross. A stolen mobile phone recovered from Prashanth's pocket provided a vital lead, confirming that it had been reported stolen. Additionally, the police identified him through a distinctive tattoo on his arm. Images of the tattoo and the deceased were shared with their counterparts in Kerala, who quickly recognised him.

While it is established that Prashanth was on the run in Bengaluru, the circumstances of his death remain unclear. Authorities are investigating how he ended up in the grocery store basement and whether foul play was involved. They are also exploring potential connections to his criminal past. Despite being notified, Prashanth's family declined to claim his body. *—Salar News*

BMTC to have feeder bus services for Aero India show

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

In an effort to ensure seamless transportation for Aero India 2025 attendees, the Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) has announced dedicated feeder bus services to the Yelahanka event venue starting from 11th February. These services are exclusively available for those who have purchased tickets in advance. According to the BMTC, the feeder buses will operate from multiple designated locations on fixed schedules, allowing attendees to select their preferred boarding point during booking. *—Salar News*

Over 266 held for various offences in Jan: B'luru cops

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

A report from Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda highlights the arrest of 266 individuals across 169 offences during January. The crackdown focused heavily on illegal gambling and drug-related crimes.

Police made notable strides against illegal betting, with 24 gambling cases resulting in 105 arrests, alongside 14 betting-related cases leading to an additional 14 arrests. The Government's fight against narcotics saw 26 cases registered under the NDPS Act, yielding 33 suspects. Efforts to combat human trafficking resulted in 19 cases under the Immoral Trafficking Act, with 23 individuals taken into custody.

Law enforcement also filed 49 cases under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, reflecting a robust action against illegal tobacco trade. Under the Excise Act, they secured seven cases and arrested 11, while six individuals were detained for arms-related offences under the Arms Act. With over 90 per cent of those arrested still under investigation, Commissioner Dayananda pledged to sustain the efforts against crime *—Salar News*

FIR FILED AGAINST LPG AGENCY

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

In a significant development, police have registered a First Information Report (FIR) against a private LPG gas agency in Begur after a gas cylinder explosion left two individuals critically injured. This is the first instance where a gas distributor has faced legal repercussions for such an incident in the city. The FIR was filed after Janhvi, an LLB student, complained that her tenant, Nithya Naya, and his wife suffered severe injuries due to an explosion on 1 February, allegedly caused by negligence from the private gas company. *—Salar News*

Kalaburagi woman hires goons to break husband's legs

KALABURAGI, 7 FRIDAY

A woman in Kalaburagi district hired three persons for Rs 5 lakh and broke her husband's legs to stop him from roaming around with another woman, police said on Friday.

Police identified the accused woman as Umadevi, her husband as Venkatesh and the hired goons as Arif, Manohar and Sunil. All four accused have been arrested.

The trio broke Venkatesh' legs by hitting with the sticks inside Attar compound in Kalaburagi last week, investigations revealed on Thursday.

Bramhapur police inspector Somaling Teradale, in whose jurisdictional area the incident occurred, said the couple's son last week had filed a complaint, alleging that his father's legs were broken by the unknown persons, but investigation revealed that his mother had hired the trio to commit the crime. During interrogation, Umadevi told police that her husband Venkatesh was found roaming with a woman.

"My husband was very close with that woman. I had objected to it and quarrelled with him several times, but he wouldn't change. So I decided to break his legs so that he will stay at home," inspector Teradale quoted Umadevi as saying. *——Salar News*

VP: Judiciary access weaponised

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar expressed his alarm regarding the increasing weaponisation of judicial access in India. Speaking at the inauguration of the Karnataka Vaibhava Literature and Cultural Festival in Ranebennur, Haveri, he highlighted attempts to manipulate the electoral process in the "oldest and strongest democracy" that operates on a democratic framework at every level.

Dhankhar noted that "divisive forces" are exploiting new tactics, particularly through judicial channels, to challenge national unity. He asserted, "In recent years, money has fuelled anti-national sentiments, and access to the judiciary has been weaponised." He urged a robust response to these challenges that seek to erode India's cultural heritage.

Dhankhar expressed concern about the cultural foundation of the nation. "When I look at the progress India is making, I am filled with hope. However, I am equally compelled to reflect on the need to preserve our cultural philosophy," he said, emphasising the importance of maintaining the very roots that support the nation. *—PTI*

AFTER SCRIBE'S EMAIL

CM orders probe into Covid-19 vaccine and sudden deaths links

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramiah directed officials to constitute a committee of experts to research whether the sudden deaths in the state are due to side effects of Covid-19 or the vaccines. Recently, there have been sudden deaths due to hearth attacks and brain-related issues.

PHOTO: PTI

"Shri Rajaram Tallur, a senior journalist, informed us via email that recent reports in daily newspapers highlight the sudden deaths of young people in the state due to heart attacks, cardiac arrests, brain-related issues, neurological disorders, and other causes. Each death is pushing dependent families into financial and social crises," a note from the Chief Minister's Office said. The note added that there is public speculation about whether these deaths might be linked to the side effects of Covid-19 or its vaccines. The journalist requested a study be conducted on the deceased individuals. "Therefore, it is directed that a committee of experts and scientists be constituted to conduct thorough research on these sudden deaths and propose measures to prevent such incidents in the future," the note added. However, a senior health department official told PTI, "There is no official data on sudden deaths, and any connection to Coronavirus or Covid-19 vaccines is yet to be ascertained." *—PTI*

UNGA Prez praises CM for K'taka's women's initiatives

BENGALURU, 7 FEB

Philemon Yang, President of the UN General Assembly, has congratulated Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for leading successful pro-women programmes that promote socio-economic and political equity within the state. Yang, who took office at the UN in September 2024 and previously served as Prime Minister of Cameroon, expressed his interest in sharing Karnataka's success stories at future UN workshops to inspire other nations to adopt similar best practices.

During his visit, Yang was welcomed by Karnataka Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh, who presented him with a bouquet crafted by women from Self-Help Groups, reflecting the state government's sustainability initiatives in line with the UN's Vision 2030. He was also gifted a book on Karnataka, highlighting the UN's theme of "Unity in Diversity."

Yang commended the state government for consistently ranking among the top states in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and praised its initiatives aimed at promoting gender equity, particularly the 'Gruha Lakshmi' scheme. *—PTI*

Delhi polls: 1,100 cases of MCC violation

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Delhi Police registered 1,100 cases of alleged Model Code of Conduct (MCC) violations and arrested or detained over 35,000 people in connection with these cases, an official said. The cases were filed between 7 January, when the MCC came into force, and 6 February. Police have confiscated 477 illegal firearms and 538 cartridges, with 499 people arrested under the Arms Act. The police have also seized 1,15,103 litres of liquor and arrested 1,426 people, 206.712 kg of drugs worth over Rs 77.9 crore, along with more than 1,200 banned injections, arresting 179 people so far. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

BJP leader Kameshwar Chaupal dies

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Kameshwar Chaupal, a prominent BJP leader and VHP functionary who laid the first brick for the Ayodhya Ram temple in 1989, has died after a prolonged illness at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his condolences, recognising Chaupal as an "abiding devotee of Lord Ram" and acknowledging his valuable contributions to the temple's construction and efforts for the welfare of the deprived, especially from the Dalit community. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath also mourned his passing, commemorating Chaupal's dedication to religious and social work. The Vishva Hindu Parishad described his death as "deeply saddening and shocking", offering prayers for peace for his soul and strength for his family during this difficult time. *—PTI*

Manipur Cong to move no-confidence motion against CM

IMPHAL, 7 FEB

Manipur Congress president Keisham Meghachandra said that the party will move a no-confidence motion against the N Biren Singh government in the state assembly. In a post on X, Meghachandra said, "Brahmastra Missile will surely hit one of the Double Engines! Congress party is set to move a no-confidence motion soon". The senior Congress leader, however, did not share any further details on the post. Congress has five MLAs in the 60-member Manipur Assembly while the NPP, another opposition party has seven legislators. The BJP has 32 MLAs and has the support of five Naga People's Front MLAs and six MLAs of JDU. There are three Independent MLAs and two legislators of the Kuki Peoples' Alliance. *—PTI*

Delhi court defers ruling on Lalu's land-for-jobs case

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

A Delhi court has postponed its decision regarding the cognisance of the CBI's chargesheet in the alleged land-for-jobs scam involving former railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav until February 17. Special judge Vishal Gogne sought further clarification from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on key aspects of the final report. On 30 January, the CBI confirmed it had secured the necessary sanctions to prosecute all accused, including public servant RK Mahajan.

The case stems from Group-D appointments made in the West Central Zone of Railways between 2004 and 2009, allegedly in exchange for land parcels transferred to Yadav's family. The CBI initiated the inquiry on 18 May 2022, targeting Yadav, his family, and other unnamed officials and private individuals. *—PTI*

AAP cries foul over ACB visit amid poaching charges

BJP called the allegations baseless & bid to divert attention

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

High political drama unfolded in the national capital on Friday as an Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) team reached AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal's residence at 5, Ferozeshah Road.

AAP strongly criticised the ACB's action, calling it an attempt to intimidate the party ahead of the election results.

AAP's legal cell chief Sanjeev Nasiar alleged that the ACB initially had no legal notice and was sitting outside Kejriwal's house without clarity on their purpose.

"They did not have any legal notice at first. After one-and-a-half hours, they served us with a notice. This drama is orchestrated by the LG office in collusion with the BJP. The officers were under pressure," Nasiar claimed.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh backed these allegations and filed a complaint with the ACB, stating that more than 16 AAP candidates had been approached by unidentified individuals attempting to lure them away from the party.

"I am a member of the PAC (Political Affairs Committee) of the Aam Aadmi Party and also the party's leader in Parliament. On February 6, around 2.30 pm when I was present in Parliament, I personally received information from my colleagues that the current MLAs and party candidates are being contacted by the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party and are being asked to join the BJP by offering bribes worth crores of rupees and ministerial posts," Singh said in his complaint.

Singh further asked for appropriate action on his complaint.

ACB at Arvind Kejriwal's house after Delhi Lt Governor ordered probe into the allegation that BJP attempted to poach AAP's candidates **PHOTO: PTI**

The BJP, however, dismissed AAP's accusations, labelling them as baseless and an attempt to deflect attention from the party's internal troubles. The controversy erupted after Delhi BJP general secretary Vishnu Mittal submitted a representation to Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena, urging action against AAP for allegedly spreading misinformation about poaching attempts.

Following this, Saxena directed the ACB to conduct an inquiry, leading to the issuance of the notice to Kejriwal. *—PTI*

EC refused to upload voters data, says Kejri

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

On the eve of counting of votes for the Assembly elections in Delhi, AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Friday alleged that the Election Commission (EC) has refused to upload Form 17C, which contains details of votes polled per booth in each Assembly segment, despite multiple requests from the party.

In response, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has launched a website where it has uploaded Form 17C data for all the Assembly seats, he said.

In a post on X, Kejriwal said, "This form contains all details of votes polled at each booth. Throughout the day, we will present data for every Assembly and every booth in a tabulated format so that every voter can access this information." Criticising the apex poll body, Kejriwal said ensuring such transparency should have been its responsibility. *—PTI*

EC added more voters than adults in M'rashtra: Rahul

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut with LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule in New Delhi on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has raised serious concerns over alleged irregularities in the Maharashtra electoral rolls, claiming the voter list for the upcoming assembly polls exceeds the state's total adult population. At a joint press conference with leaders from Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP), Gandhi highlighted that 39 lakh new voters were added to the state's list in merely five months, contrasting sharply with the 32 lakh additions made over the preceding five years.

Gandhi questioned the credibility of the Election Commission (EC), stating, "Maharashtra's adult population is 9.54 crore, yet the voter list shows over 9.7 crore registered voters. This discrepancy raises urgent questions." He emphasised that this issue disproportionately affects Dalit, tribal, and minority communities, alleging that many voters' names had been deleted prior to the assembly elections, suggesting a systemic bias in favour of the ruling BJP. In response, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis dismissed Gandhi's claims as an attempt to divert attention from the Congress's anticipated defeat in the Delhi assembly elections. "Rahul Gandhi is doing cover firing amid fears of imminent defeat," Fadnavis stated, asserting that the EC has satisfactorily addressed all questions related to voter additions.

Having expressed a willingness to escalate the matter to judicial channels if their demands are ignored, he urged EC to provide a complete voters' list, stating, "If you have nothing to hide, give us the list now." *—PTI*

Tax hikes to address ₹27K cr deficit in Kerala Budget

T'PURAM, 7 FEB

The Kerala government, led by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, presented its fifth budget on Friday, which is notably lacking in major populist measures. The budget for 2025-26 includes a proposed hike in road tax for electric vehicles and increased land tax, aimed at bolstering revenue.

Finance Minister KN Balagopal revealed that the state's financial needs are projected to exceed Rs 27,000 crore, prompting the introduction of various revenue-generating measures. Despite recent financial constraints, Balagopal highlighted that Kerala's own tax revenue has increased by 70 per cent, rising from Rs 47,660 crore in 2020-21 to an expected Rs 81,000 crore by March 2025.

Pinarayi Vijayan **PHOTO: PTI**

For the upcoming fiscal year, a total expenditure of Rs 32,500 crore is planned, with significant allocations for health (Rs 10,431.73 crore), rural development (Rs 7,098.74 crore), and infrastructure (Rs 3,061 crore).

The budget also outlines ambitious infrastructure projects, including the expedited construction of the Vizhinjam port, expected to be completed by December 2028.

Balagopal announced plans for a shipyard in southern Kerala and the development of metro systems in Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode. Additionally, the K-Homes initiative aims to maximise the potential of unoccupied housing and enhance tourist facilities.

In securing funds to cover the budget deficit, the government will implement a 50 per cent increase in land tax rates, impose lifetime road tax on electric vehicles based on their cost, raise road tax on older private vehicles, and revise court fees, collectively projected to generate Rs 335 crore. *—PTI*

GOVERNMENT VS GOVERNOR

SC warns of impasse if Guv withholds bills

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Supreme Court flagged the creation of an impasse if the Governor withheld his assent on the bills passed by legislative assembly. A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan said Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi couldn't simply sit over the bills based on perception of repugnancy with the Central law, without communicating his opinion.

"If repugnancy is something that troubled the Governor, then the Governor should have immediately brought it to the notice of the government, which could have reconsidered the said bills. How is the government expected to know what is in the mind of the Governor?" the bench asked Attorney General (AG) R Venkataramani, representing the Governor.

The bench questioned the status of the bills which were reserved for consideration of the President.

"If you are of the view that this bill suffers from repugnancy to the Central law, then the Governor has to say something like I am referring this bill for the consideration of the President. Otherwise, there will be an impasse. How do you expect the state government to overcome repugnancy? There cannot be an absolute deadlock." *—PTI*

Kshama Sawant **PHOTO: X**

High drama in Seattle consulate over visa denial

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Consulate General of India in Seattle reported a "law and order situation" on 7 February after unauthorised individuals, including former City Council member Kshama Sawant, entered the premises and exhibited aggressive behaviour towards staff due to a visa dispute.

Sawant, who was with her husband, claimed that while her husband received an emergency visa to visit his ailing mother in India, her application had been rejected multiple times without explanation, being placed on a so-called "reject list". She alleged that the Consulate was threatening to call the police on them.

Sawant and her supporters, associated with Workers Strike Back, described their action as peaceful civil disobedience aimed at demanding clarity regarding her visa denial. *—PTI*

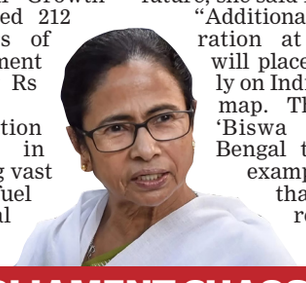
Mamata says biz summit was a dream before her eyes

KOLKATA, 7 FEB

A day after the eighth edition of her government's business summit concluded, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the state has emerged as a powerhouse of growth and opportunity.

In a post on X, Banerjee said, "Yesterday, as I stood at the Bengal Global Business Summit, surrounded by policymakers, corporate leaders, entrepreneurs and global visionaries, I saw a dream unfolding before my eyes.

"1.72 crore people have been lifted out of poverty, and Bengal emerged as a powerhouse of growth and opportunity. I am proud to share that this year's Bengal Growth Summit has yielded 212 MoUs and Letters of Intent, with investment proposals totalling Rs 4,40,595 crore."



The coal extraction process began in Birbhum, unlocking vast reserves that will fuel Bengal's industrial future, she said in the post.

"Additionally, oil exploration at Ashoknagar will place Bengal firmly on India's petroleum map. The dream of 'Biswa Bangla,' a Bengal that leads by example, a Bengal that is future-ready, a Bengal that speaks to the world, is a reality, unfolding before our eyes." Recalling the words of social reformer Gopal Krishna Gokhale, she said in the post: "My mission was clear: to build Bengal where every resident could proudly say, 'What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow.' *—PTI*

PARLIAMENT CHAOS

Oppn MPs protest over arrest of Indian fisherfolk in SL

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Opposition MPs staged a protest in the Parliament complex on Friday against the ongoing arrests of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan authorities and demanded a permanent resolution to the issue. The demonstration saw participation from MPs of the DMK, Congress, and Left parties from Tamil Nadu, along with members from other opposition factions, including Derek O'Brien of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Sudama Prasad from CPI(ML) Liberation.

Holding placards with messages such as "Justice For Tamil Fisherman" and "Bring Back Our Fishermen", the protesting lawmakers voiced concerns over the treatment of Tamil fishermen, asserting that it is a national issue given they are Indian nationals. DMK MP Tiruchi Siva highlighted the violence faced by these fishermen, stating, "They are being tortured, harassed, and killed for years, yet the government has not taken concrete steps to address this."

> **There is a pattern with the NDA government... we know the story of Robin Hood -- taking from the rich and giving to the poor. The BJP has mastered the art of taking from the poor and giving to the wealthy elite. So, it's reverse Robin Hood**
>
> -Abhishek Banerjee, TMC MP

He further noted that there is a proposal to classify the fisherfolk as Scheduled Tribes to offer them better protection. Fellow DMK MP Kanimozhi said Chief Minister MK Stalin has repeatedly urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to intervene.

They reported that nearly 97 fishermen have been arrested recently, with boats seized, severely impacting their livelihoods. Congress MP Manickam Tagore echoed the call for intervention. This issue has long strained relations between India and Sri Lanka, with allegations that the Sri Lankan Navy has fired upon Indian fishermen in disputed waters. Earlier this month, ten fishermen were arrested, and reports indicate that over 550 Indian fisherfolk have been detained in 2024 alone. *—PTI*

DMK MPs stage a protest against arrest of fishermen by Sri Lankan Navy, during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

10,152 Indians in foreign jails: Govt

The Ministry of External Affairs has revealed that 10,152 Indians, including undertrials, are currently imprisoned in foreign jails. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh presented detailed statistics for 86 countries in Parliament, with significant numbers in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. He confirmed no abnormal increase in Indian prisoners in Qatar following the FIFA World Cup, stating 611 are detained there. *—PTI*

India's exports to reach $800B: Goyal

Piyush Goyal, India's Commerce and Industry Minister, announced that the country's exports are projected to reach a historic USD 800 billion in the fiscal year 2024-25. Goyal refuted claims of declining exports, highlighting consistent forex reserves above USD 600 billion. He acknowledged increasing imports for certain essential commodities and emphasised that this reflects rising domestic consumption and investment opportunities. *—PTI*

Bill on workers' rights safety inroduced

Around fifty private members' bills were introduced in the Rajya Sabha, from employees' rights regarding artificial intelligence to the prevention of deepfake content. Notable proposals include the Artificial Intelligence (Protection of Rights of Employees) Bill and the Deepfake Prevention and Criminalisation Bill. Several bills aimed at increasing Parliament's annual sitting days were also presented by members across parties. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Court issues arrest warrant against Sonu Sood

LUDHIANA, 7 FEB

A court in Punjab has issued an arrest warrant against Bollywood actor Sonu Sood in connection with an alleged fraud case. The warrant was issued by Ludhiana Judicial Magistrate Ramanpreet Kaur. The case involves an alleged fraud of Rs 10 lakh, filed by Ludhiana-based lawyer Rajesh Khanna against one Mohit Shukla, in which he claimed he was lured into investing in a fake Rijika coin. Sonu Sood was summoned to court to testify but failed to appear, leading to the issuance of the arrest warrant. In its order, the Ludhiana court directed the Officer In-Charge of Oshiwara Police Station, Andheri West, Mumbai, to arrest Sonu Sood. *—ANI*

FIR against woman who accused BJP leader of rape

SHIMLA, 7 FEB

Six people, including a woman who had accused Haryana BJP Chief Mohan Lal Badoli and singer Rocky Mittal of rape, have been booked for extortion and criminal intimidation, police said on Friday. Himachal Pradesh police filed a cancellation report in a court in the alleged gangrape case against Badoli and Mittal. Badoli and Mittal were booked last year after the woman alleged that she was raped by them in a hotel in Kasauli. Mittal, said he was contacted by the woman in September last year.Mittal cited several calls from the woman and her associate in September last year and claimed they threatened to implicate him and Badoli in a "honey trap" case. he accused demanded Rs 50 lakh for a compromise in the gangrape case. *—PTI*

26 bonded labourers freed from Pune factory

THANE, 7 FEB

Twenty-six bonded labourers along with their family members, totalling 48 persons, have been rescued from a charcoal-making unit in Pune district, an official said on Friday. Acting on the complaint of the victims, all from Maharashtra's Raigad district, police booked one Sayaji Bandalkar who allegedly subjected them to forced labour, the official said. For the charcoal unit at Girvi village in Indapur tehsil of Pune district, Bandalkar allegedly forced the men to bring wood from the jungle, while women and children were held captive at the site and often made to work in farms.After learning about the plight of the bonded labourers, the non-profit Shramajeevi Sanghatana worked with the authorities and ensured the rescue of the 26 bonded labourers. *—PTI*

Elephant on rampage claims life of Kerala mahout

PALAKKAD, 7 FEB

A mahout lost his life and another individual was injured after an elephant went rogue during a 'nercha' ceremony at a mosque in Koottanadu, in the northern part of Kerala, late on Thursday night. The incident unfolded around 10.30pm during the annual 'nercha' event, which honours the saints interred at the Koottanadu Shuhada Makham mosque. The elephant, identified as Vallamkulam Narayanan Kutty, launched an attack on 42-year-old Kunjumon Ibrahim, a resident of Kottayam, while he was returning from the procession featuring elephants from 28 participating teams. Kunjumon was quickly transported to a hospital in Kunnamkulam but tragically succumbed to his injuries en route. The elephant was eventually subdued and removed from the scene, according to reports.*—PTI*

HC junks WB's plea against lifer to RG Kar rape accused

However, HC admits a similar plea by CBI seeking death row

KOLKATA, 7 FEB

The Calcutta High Court has rejected an appeal by the West Bengal government contesting the life sentence of Sanjay Roy, the only convict in the RG Kar hospital rape and murder case, while admitting a similar plea from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) seeking the death penalty.

The court's division bench, comprising Justices Debangsu Basak and Md Sabbar Rashidi, ruled that since the CBI conducted the investigation and prosecution, its appeal regarding the inadequacy of the sentence is to be heard. However, the bench denied the state's appeal, which had argued that it also had the right to challenge the trial court's sentence.

On 20 January, the trial court sentenced Roy to life imprisonment until the end of his natural life. PHOTO: PTI

The incident occurred on August 9, when an on-duty medic was raped and murdered within the seminar room of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, igniting nationwide outrage. Roy was apprehended by Kolkata Police the following day. Subsequently, the investigation was transferred to the CBI, which filed a charge sheet on 7 October, with charges framed by the trial court on 4 November.

On 20 January, the trial court sentenced Roy to life imprisonment until the end of his natural life. Both the CBI and the state government have since filed appeals in the high court seeking more severe punishment for Roy. *—PTI*

RELATIVES VANDALISE PREMISES

4 arrested in girl's sexual harassment at TN school

MANAPPARAI, 7 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Four people, including the head of a private school and her husband have been arrested in the sexual harassment of a class IV student of the institution here, police said on Friday.

The woman's husband was the "key accused", a senior police official said.

The school trustee who is alleged to have sexually harassed the girl; his wife, the secretary, the school chairman, deputy secretary and the school principal were all arrested.

The incident happened in Manapparai in Tiruchirappalli.

Police sources said the issue came to light after the minor girl - a class IV student - complained to her parents that the man had sexually assaulted her in the school on Thursday morning.

Police were on the lookout for one more person.

Earlier, late on Thursday, the enraged relatives of the girl and locals went on a rampage, breaking window panes and flower pots in the school, besides damaging a car parked there. Another group of people resorted to a road roko at Nochimedu on the Tiruchi - Dindigul national highway bypass road for over 30 minutes condemning the incident and demanding action.

The protest prompted the intervention of the police personnel. *—PTI*

A WORRYING RISE

GBS death tally reaches six in Pune

PUNE, 7 FEB

PHOTO: X

The number of suspected fatalities from Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) in Pune district, Maharashtra, has risen to six following the death of a 63-year-old man. A health official reported that the man was admitted to a hospital in Sinhgad Road with symptoms including fever, diarrhoea, and weakness in his lower limbs. He was diagnosed with GBS, but his condition worsened, leading to his death from an acute ischemic stroke.

Of the six fatalities, five are suspected cases, while one has been confirmed as a GBS-related death. In total, the number of suspected GBS cases in Pune has risen to 173, with 140 diagnosed with the syndrome, according to a release from the Maharashtra health department. Among these, 34 are from Pune Municipal Corporation limits, 87 from newly added villages, 22 from Pimpri Chinchwad, 22 from rural areas, and eight from other districts.

Currently, 72 patients have been discharged, 55 are in intensive care, and 21 are on ventilators. Officials noted that a water sample from a housing society near Nanded village tested positive for campylobacter jejuni, a bacterium associated with gastroenteritis that can trigger GBS.

As a response, 30 private reverse osmosis plants have been sealed for providing unfit drinking water.

The Pune Municipal Corporation plans to implement new standard operating procedures to enhance water safety in the region. *—PTI*

HC GRANTS BAIL TO 2 HELD FOR 'PLOT' TO KILL SALMAN KHAN

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

The Bombay High Court on Friday granted bail to two men arrested last year in connection with an alleged conspiracy of the Bishnoi gang to kill Bollywood actor Salman Khan near his farmhouse in Panvel.

Justice N R Borkar granted the bail applications of Gaurav Bhatia alias Sandeep Bishnoi and Waspi Mehmud Khan.

The detailed order was not available yet.

Navi Mumbai Police had claimed last year that these two men, along with the other accused, had conducted a recce at Salman Khan's farmhouse at Panvel near Mumbai, the area around his house in Bandra, and some places he visited for film shooting.

Subsequently, a case was registered against 18 members of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang for allegedly hatching a conspiracy to kill the Bollywood star. *—PTI*

MAN PUSHES PREGNANT WOMAN OUT OF TRAIN AFTER RAPE ATTEMPT

VELLORE, 7 FEB

A 31-year-old man, who was out on bail in murder case, was arrested allegedly for attempting to sexually assault a four-month pregnant woman in a moving train and pushing her out of the compartment near Katpadi, police said on Friday.

The 36-year-old victim, a native of Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, was travelling alone in the women's compartment on Thursday night when the man, said to be a history-sheeter, boarded the train at Jolarpet railway station, and attempted to sexually assault her, police said.

Resisting his attempt, she ran towards the restroom to lock herself but he pushed her out of the train, a police official said. She sustained fractures on her hand and leg.

Passers-by who noticed her fall from the train admitted her to the Government Medical College Hospital in Vellore. *—PTI*

Court acquits jawan of rape, orders perjury case against woman

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

A Delhi court has "honourably" acquitted an Army Major of rape charges, holding the FIR against him was "false" and filed with ulterior motives.

While ordering a case of perjury against the woman, additional sessions judge Pawan Kumar said the officer underwent the "trauma of trial" for such a heinous offence based on a "false story of rape".

"A false FIR was lodged against the accused for ulterior motives and he deserves honourable acquittal. The accused stands honourably acquitted of the offences for which he has been facing the trial," said the court.

The complainant, the officer's domestic help, resided at the servant quarters in his residence. She alleged the Army officer raped her on the intervening night of 12-13 July in 2018. It also came on record that her husband was found hanging on the same night and a probe report held it be a case of suicide.

In its judgment on 3 January, the court said, "On a careful scrutiny of the facts and evidence and in the guiding light of settled legal prepositions, this court is of the view that the testimony of the prosecutrix is full of material contradictions and improvements. The prosecutrix is inconsistent in her statements throughout the investigation and trial."

The court said it would be "highly unsafe" to convict the accused, represented by advocate Bharat Chugh, based on the complainant's uncorroborated sole testimony and observed the accused, serving in the army, suffered irreparable loss to his reputation because of "false litigation".

"The courts are not merely the protector of constitutional and legal rights of the aggrieved, rather, they act as healers to administer the panacea of justice to the aggrieved. *—PTI*

SC bins plea over demolition in Sambhal

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

The Supreme Court has declined to hear a contempt plea against Sambhal authorities accused of breaching its previous ruling on property demolitions, directing the petitioner to approach the relevant high court instead. A bench led by Justices BR Gavai and K Vinod Chandran advised Mohammed Ghayoor, the petitioner, to file his grievance with the jurisdictional high court, reinforcing its 13 November, 2024, verdict which allowed for such appeals.

The plea, presented by advocate Chand Qureshi, claimed that authorities demolishing part of Ghayoor's property on 10-11 January did so without issuing a prior showcause notice, as mandated by the Supreme Court's pan-India guidelines.

Ghayoor alleged that the demolition violated his rights and disregarded legal protocols.

While dismissing the plea, the bench encouraged Ghayoor to seek appropriate legal recourse to prevent third-party interests in his property.

The original ruling stated that no demolitions should occur without a prior notice, either in accordance with local municipal laws or within 15 days from notification. *—PTI*

SC REJECTS NEET-PG 2024 FRESH COUNSELLING PLEA

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Supreme Court of India has dismissed a petition seeking the cancellation of the All India Quota (AIQ) round 3 counselling for NEET-PG 2024, citing potential cascading effects on state counselling processes. A bench comprising Justices BR Gavai and K Vinod Chandran expressed concerns that granting the plea would lead to complications for numerous states, as many students had already participated in the counselling.

The petitioners, represented by advocate Tanvi Dubey, argued that round 3 began before the conclusion of round 2 for state counselling, disadvantaging those eligible for AIQ who were unable to register. They claimed this allowed ineligible candidates from certain states to block seats. *—PTI*

Don't host award event in Ratan Tata's name: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Friday directed a journalist not to host an award event in the name of "Ratan Tata National Icon Award" or use "Tata" and "Tata Trusts" trademarks.

Justice Mini Pushkarna passed the order after one Rajat Srivastava, founder of Delhi Today Group, agreed not to use Ratan Tata's name and refrain from proceeding with the award event under Ratan Tata's name.

"This court notes that Tata is a well-known mark. Late Mr Ratan Tata is a well known figure. His name itself is liable to be protected," it said.

The court asked the defendant, Srivastava, to give an undertaking and posted the matter on February 12 for compliance.

The court was hearing a suit filed by Sir Ratan Tata Trust and Tata Sons Pvt Ltd seeking to injunct and restrain the defendants from unauthorisedly using the plaintiffs' registered trademarks Tata and Tata Trusts.

They have also sought damages of over Rs 2 crore for allegedly causing harm to their reputation and goodwill. *—PTI*

4TH FIRE INCIDENT

Fire breaks out at ISKCON in Maha Kumbh

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 7 FEB

A significant fire erupted at the ISKCON camp in Mahakumbh Nagar on Friday, swiftly engulfing over a dozen nearby camps, according to officials. Fortunately, no casualties have been reported.

Chief Fire Officer Pramod Sharma confirmed that the blaze was detected at 10.35 am, prompting the immediate deployment of around a dozen fire tenders to the scene. "Upon receiving information about the fire at the ISKCON camp in Sector 18, the fire brigade was quickly dispatched. The blaze was fully contained within half an hour," he stated.

Fire-fighters and security personnel try to control the situation after a fire broke out at Sector 18 in Maha Kumbh area PHOTO: PTI

The fire spread to over a dozen adjacent camps, resulting in substantial damage. Officials are currently investigating the cause of the fire and assessing the extent of the destruction. The ISKCON camp gained prominence for operating a large community kitchen in collaboration with the Adani Foundation at Sector 19, where Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani had visited in January, distributing free meals to pilgrims. This latest incident marks the fourth significant fire at the Maha Kumbh. *—PTI*

Schools to stay shut amid Maha Kumbh

Amid significant influx of devotees ahead of Maghi Purnima, all secondary schools in Prayagraj have suspended physical classes from 7 to 12 February, transitioning to online learning. This decision was made to alleviate potential commuting issues for students.

4 ARRESTED AS NCB SEIZES DRUGS WORTH ₹200 CR IN NAVI MUMBAI

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

A The Narcotics Control Bureau has exposed a drug syndicate and seized various banned substances worth about Rs 200 crore from Navi Mumbai after arresting four persons, an official said on Friday.

According to an official from the NCB's Mumbai zonal unit, a group of people based abroad are operating the syndicate and some of the seized drugs had been sourced from the US through courier or small cargo services and human carriers.

The official said they confiscated 200 grams of cocaine from a parcel that was to be sent to Australia last month and busted the syndicate by tracking down the source of the drug to Navi Mumbai.

NCB seized 11.54 kg of "very high-quality" cocaine, hydroponic weed and 200 packets (5.5 kg) of cannabis gummies worth about Rs 200 crore from Navi Mumbai last week, the official said.

Four persons have been arrested in connection with the haul. The members of the ring used pseudonyms in their day-to-day conversations for their drug dealings. *—PTI*

CHEMICALS BLEED INTO WATER

Sarandi stream turns red due to unknown contaminants in Argentina
PHOTO: PTI

With Gaza, Trump bats for America-everywhere

Weeks into his second go-around in the White House, President Donald Trump laid out plans to use American might to "take over" and reconstruct Gaza, threatened to reclaim US control of the Panama Canal and floated the idea that the US could buy Greenland from Denmark, which has shown no interest in parting with the island.

The rhetorical shift from America First to America Everywhere is leaving even some of his allies slack-jawed and wondering if he's really serious.

The president's shocking declaration Tuesday that he wants to remove roughly 1.8 million Palestinians from Gaza and redevelop the war-scarred territory into the "Riviera of the Middle East" with "long-term" American ownership raises anew questions about the direction of Trump's foreign policy during his norm-breaking second term.

Is Trump's imperialist talk just meant to appear tough on the world stage? Is he merely trying to give Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cover with far-right members of his governing coalition who oppose moving forward with the second phase of the cease-fire deal? Is it a land grab by a president who sees the world through the prism of a New York real estate developer? Or a bit of all of above?

Both his top diplomat, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and his press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, edged away from Trump's suggestion that Gazans would be relocated "permanently."

Rubio said Trump's proposal to take "ownership" of Gaza and redevelop the area should be seen as a "generous" offer.

"It was not meant as a hostile move," Rubio said during his visit to Guatemala. "It was meant as a very generous move."

Rubio added that the moment was "akin to a natural disaster." People won't be able to live Gaza for years to come because there are unexploded

A Palestinian man burns a painting depicting US President Donald Trump in Gaza City in 2019 ***PHOTO: ANI***

munitions, debris and rubble.

"In the interim, obviously people are going to have to live somewhere while you're rebuilding it," he said.

Trump would not rule out the possibility of U.S. troops being deployed to carry out his plan. But Leavitt downplayed the prospects that Trump's plan would come with a cost to American taxpayers or that Trump would deploy U.S. forces.

"It's been made very clear to the president that the United States needs to be involved in this rebuilding effort, to ensure stability in the region for all people," Leavitt told reporters at the White House. "But that does not mean boots on the ground in Gaza. It does not mean American taxpayers will be funding this effort."

The White House has yet to explain under what authority Trump could carry his Gaza proposal. Nor has the administration clarified how Trump would get around stiff opposition to any relocation of Gaza's population from Arab allies, including Egypt and Jordan, that he expects to take in Palestinians.

Still, they insist that Trump is just looking for an answer to the generational strife between Israelis and Palestinians that's convulsed the region for decades. "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results," Leavitt said. "President Trump is an outside-of-the-box thinker and a visionary leader who solves problems that many others claim are unsolvable."

The expansionist talk in Gaza is playing out as Trump has begun an effort to shut down the US Agency for International Development, the federal agency that provides crucial aid that funds education and fights starvation, epidemics and poverty overseas. Trump sees it as a poster child of government waste.

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del, said that it was particularly infuriating that Trump floated the idea at a moment when he is also dismantling that USAID.

"Why on earth would we abandon decades of well-established humanitarian programs around the world, and now launch into one of the world's greatest humanitarian challenges?" Coons said.

The Arab League, the 22-member regional grouping, said the proposal "represents a recipe for instability." British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said displaced Palestinians "must be allowed home." German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said displacement of the Palestinian population would be "unacceptable" and "against international law."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Trump ally, said "the idea of Americans going in on the ground in Gaza is a nonstarter for every senator."

But even as his Gaza proposal was panned, Trump continued to insist that it has widespread support. "Everybody loves it," Trump said. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر

A strange 'earthquake swarm' is shaking Greece

Greece's government has just declared a state of emergency on the island of Santorini, as earthquakes shake the island multiple times a day and sometimes only minutes apart.

The "earthquake swarm" is also affecting other nearby islands in the Aegean Sea. It began gradually with numerous very minor (less than magnitude 3) and mostly imperceptible earthquakes in late January. However, at the start of February, the seismic activity intensified as the quakes became larger and more frequent.

So far, several thousand quakes have been recorded in the last two weeks. As many as 30 a day have been above magnitude 4.0 – most of them at less than 10km depth, which is large and shallow enough to be felt by people living on local islands.

These larger earthquakes have resulted in rock falls along the islands' coastal cliffs, as well as minor damage to vulnerable buildings. The largest earthquake so far was magnitude 5.1 on 6 February, which was also felt in the capital city, Athens, as well as in Crete and in parts of Turkey more than 240km away.

Usually a popular tourist destination, Santorini is now virtually empty. Over the past week, some 11,000 holidaymakers and locals have left the island, with many fearing the seismic activity may presage a volcanic eruption.

Greece is one of the most seismically active regions in Europe. The current seismic activity is located near Anydros, an uninhabited islet about 30km northeast of Santorini. This region lies within the volcanic arc of the "Hellenic subduction zone," where the African tectonic plate is slowly sliding beneath the Eurasian plate (and specifically the Aegean microplate).

The region hosts volcanoes as well as numerous weak zones in the crust – what earth scientists often call "faults".

Santorini itself is a mostly submerged caldera – a crater formed as a result of volcanic activity over the past 180,000 years, with its last eruption in the 1950s. Earthquakes can be connected to volcanic activity – specifically, the movement of magma beneath the surface.

However, this earthquake sequence is not located beneath Santorini. And local scientists monitoring Santorini have reported no change to indicate the current seismic activity is a forerunner of another Santorini eruption. Instead, the earthquakes appear to align with faults lying between Santorini and the neighbouring island Amorgos.

Nearby faults are known to have produced earthquakes before. For example, in 1956, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake also produced a damaging tsunami and was soon followed by a magnitude 7.2 aftershock.

More than 53 people died as a result of this earthquake and the aftershock and tsunami. Many more were injured.

Tectonic earthquakes occur when accumulating stress in Earth's crust is suddenly released, causing a rupture along a fault and releasing energy in the form of seismic waves.

Typically, moderate to major earthquakes (known as mainshocks) are followed by smaller quakes (known as aftershocks) that gradually diminish in magnitude and frequency over time. This is what seismologists call the mainshock–aftershock sequence.

Some sequences behave differently and do not exhibit a single stand-out event. Instead, they involve multiple earthquakes of a similar size that take place over days, weeks, or even months. These types of sequences are what seismologists call "earthquake swarms".

The 1956 earthquake was a mainshock–aftershock sequence, with aftershocks lasting at least eight months after the mainshock. However, the current ongoing seismic activity near Santorini, at least as of 7 February, features thousands of earthquakes, many with magnitudes ranging between 4.0 and 5.0. This suggests it is most likely an earthquake swarm.

Earthquake swarms are often associated with fluid movement in the earth's crust and the resulting seismic activity is usually less dramatic than the sudden movement of a strong mainshock.

We cannot predict exactly what will come from the earthquake activity near Santorini.

Although swarms typically involve earthquakes of lower magnitudes, they can last for days to weeks, or persist for months. They can even slow down, and then intensify again, unsettling locals with intermittent ground shaking. *—PTI*

Fire service rescuers at the airport of the earthquake-hit island of Santorini ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Lack of representation: Women in military face upward battle

In India, which prides itself for promoting "Nari Shakti" (Women Power) in the defense forces, a debate on women in command roles has come to the fore.

In late 2024, a letter from a top Indian general alleged that there were management issues in the army units led by women officers.

The five-page letter was intended to be an internal review of eight female commanding officers, but it sparked a fervent national discussion after it was published in Indian media.

The general has accused female commanding officers of having "mundane ego problems" and a "lack of empathy" for troops in their units. The document even goes on to say that the lack of empathy may be attributable to "a need to overcompensate."

But in New Delhi, 20-year-old Mehak Preet said she was unperturbed by this lack of faith in women soldiers, which she has witnessed time and again as she works toward her dream of serving a combat role in the Indian Air Force.

"Obviously men and women are physically different, there is no doubt about that, but when it comes to serving the nation, it does not depend upon the gender of a soldier, they are all trained equally," she told DW.

Nearly 7,000 female officers are currently serving in India's Army, and over 1,600 in the Air Force, according to the latest government figures released in 2023.

During World War I, women were inducted as nurses in army hospitals because there were not enough men. In 1942, a Women's Auxiliary Corps was established during the British colonial rule to serve in non-combatant, clerical roles.

"From that we have come a long way. In fact, my batch was the first where we were sent to field hospitals and field postings, and after that there has been no looking back," Madhuri Kanitkar, a retired army doctor, told DW. Kanitkar was the third Indian woman to be elevated to the rank of lieutenant general.

At one point, women were allowed to serve in India's armed forces on so-called short service commissions, granting them officer ranks for a limited period, However, there were also legal breaks on the progress of their career.

A historic Supreme Court order in 2020 granted women a permanent commission. This enabled them to access the same opportunities as their male counterparts, such as holding command posts.

Women in India still cannot serve in some core combat roles of the army, including infantry, armoured and mechanised units ***PHOTO: ANI***

"It took cultural change for us to be looked at the way we were looked at. Otherwise, in the defense forces, women were only the lady wives of male officers," said Cheryl Dutta, a retired squadron leader and one of the Air Force's first female helicopter pilots.

Women in India still cannot serve in some core combat roles of the army, including infantry, armored and mechanized units. However, in a sign of progress, a group of women is now serving in the army's artillery regiment.

Kanitkar stressed there are cautious and firm steps being taken when it comes to inducting women in combat roles.

"One thing is putting women in combat roles for tokenism, and the other is whether there is a real need for it. At the moment, we have enough people in the combat roles," she said.

According to Kanitkar, logistics need to be taken care of when you go into combat roles.

"In a tank where there are just three people in a very small space, how would women get their privacy? It is good to take those steps in a guarded manner," she said.

Currently, India's Armed Forces Medical Services, and separately, the Medical Services of the army and the navy are all headed by women.

Back in 2020, the Indian government argued in front of the Supreme Court that men in the armed forces were not yet "mentally schooled" to accept female officers in command.

Kanitkar said that in her experience with the medical corps, gender was never a concern. "I was interacting with commanders across my area of responsibility and I never felt any kind of discomfort from my side or from them. They looked at my professionalism. I think it's competence which matters," Kanitkar explained.

Retired Air Force squadron leader Dutta said male Indian army soldiers and airmen display some societal prejudice against women in the early stages of the service, seeing them as the weaker gender.

"When you come into the forces you leave some amount of your societal thinking behind, become a soldier and you have a role to play." she said. "The gender barrier is moving and being eroded slowly. But it will take time."

A woman who decides to join India's armed forces is still seen as breaking several gender and societal barriers. Some women officers feel that they still struggle to prove themselves.

"A woman should not have to keep constantly proving herself that she is good in a certain role. She has got exactly the same training as her male counterpart. It's just that our way of looking at it, the perspective, probably needs to change," said Dutta.

"We are looking at things from the bottom to top. I think we also need to look at it from the top to the bottom. When you are looking from top down, you need to change and see it in a very gender-neutral way. You need to look at it as you are assessing a soldier and not a woman. And not look at her as if she is weak," said Dutta.

India's advancement to ensure gender equality in the armed forces has been slow, but Indian Air Force aspirant Mehak has not been deterred from being optimistic.

"I really want to see the day when Indian women are allowed on the front lines," she said. *—DW News*

PHOTO: X

Plane with 10 onboard goes missing in Alaska

ANCHORAGE, 7 FEB

An aircraft carrying 10 people across Alaska's Norton Sound went missing on Thursday afternoon and rescuers searched into the night for any sign of the aircraft. The Bering Air Caravan was heading from Unalakleet to Nome with nine passengers and a pilot, said Alaska's Department of Public Safety. Authorities were working to determine its last known coordinates. The disappearance marks the third major incident in US aviation in eight days. The plane left Unalakleet at 2:37pm, and officials lost contact with it less than an hour later, said David Olson, director of operations for Bering Air. The aircraft was about 19km offshore. "Staff at Bering Air is working hard to gather details, get emergency assistance, search and rescue going," Olson said. *—PTI*

12 terrorists killed in Pak's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR, 7 FEB

Security forces have killed 12 terrorists in an intelligence-based operation in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, a statement said. A security personnel was also killed in the operation on Wednesday night in the Hasan Khel area of North Waziristan, said the Pakistan Army's media wing. During the operation, security forces effectively targeted the terrorist hideout, resulting in the elimination of 12 insurgents. Weapons and ammunition were recovered from the dead insurgents, who had been involved in multiple terrorist activities against security forces as well as civilians. A clearance operation was ongoing to eliminate the presence of any remaining insurgents in the area. *—PTI*

S'pore minister of Indian-origin in 'home detention'

SINGAPORE, 7 FEB

Singapore's former transport minister of Indian origin, S. Iswaran, who was jailed in October for 12 months on corruption charges, was placed in "home detention" on Friday, a news report said. "Like all inmates placed on the Home Detention Scheme, S Iswaran will serve his remaining sentence at his residence under specified conditions, including curfew monitoring using an electronic monitoring tag, being gainfully occupied either in work, study or training and reporting to SPS for counselling," Channel News Asia quoted Singapore Prison Service (SPS) as saying. Iswaran began his 12-month jail term on October 7, 2024. *—PTI*

Taiwan spots surge in Chinese military activity near island

TAIPEI, 7 FEB

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence on Friday reported detecting nine Chinese aircraft, six naval vessels, and two official ships around the island early in the morning. In a post on X, the ministry also stated that six PRC balloons were detected during the same period. The ministry further noted that nine of the detected aircraft crossed the median line and entered Taiwan's southwestern Air Defense Identification Zone. In recent weeks, China has been visibly boosting its ability to invade Taiwanese beaches with innovative new naval equipment. This includes the formal launching of an enormous landing helicopter assault (LHA) vessel, the likes of which no other navy in the world possesses, and the mass production of floating bridge docks to assist the unloading of ships during beach landings. *—ANI*

Trump imposes sanctions on International Criminal Court

Israel probe irks US president, says it has no jurisdiction

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

President Donald Trump on Thursday signed an executive order imposing sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC) over investigations of Israel, a close US ally.

Neither the US nor Israel is a member of or recognises the court, which has issued an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for alleged war crimes over his military response in Gaza after the Hamas attack against Israel in October 2023. Tens of thousands of Palestinians, including children, have been killed during the Israeli military's response.

The order Trump signed accuses the ICC of engaging in "illegitimate and baseless actions targeting America and our close ally Israel" and of abusing its power by issuing "baseless arrest warrants" against Netanyahu and his former defense minister, Yoav Gallant.

"The ICC has no jurisdiction over the United States or Israel," the order states, adding that the court had set a "dangerous precedent" with its actions against both countries.

President Donald Trump meets with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the Oval Office of the White House, Tuesday, Feb. 4, 2025, in

Meanwhile, ICC called on its member states to stand up against sanctions imposed by President Donald Trump, saying the move was an attempt to "harm its independent and impartial judicial work".

Trump's action came as Netanyahu was visiting Washington.

The order says the US will impose "tangible and significant consequences" on those responsible for the ICC's "transgressions". Actions may include blocking property and assets and not allowing ICC officials, employees and relatives to enter the US.

Human rights activists said sanctioning court officials would have a chilling effect and mar US interests in other conflict zones where the ICC is investigating.

"Victims of human rights abuses around the world turn to the ICC when they have nowhere else to go, and President Trump's executive order will make it harder for them to find justice," said Charlie Hogle, staff attorney with American Civil Liberties Union's National Security Project.

"The order also raises serious First Amendment concerns because it puts people in the United States at risk of harsh penalties for helping the court identify and investigate atrocities…It's an attack on both accountability and free speech." *—PTI*

Plea against US citizenship order in Boston court

BOSTON, 7 FEB

A federal judge in Boston on Friday will consider a request from 18 states to block President Donald Trump's executive order ending birthright citizenship for the children of parents who are in the US illegally. The hearing comes after a federal judge in Seattle blocked the order on Thursday and said Trump was trying to change the Constitution with an executive order. *—PTI*

Hungary to shut down US-funded media, NGOs

BUDAPEST, 7 FEB

Hungary will take legal action to eliminate NGOs and media outlets in the country that receive funding from the US and other countries, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Friday. Orban, an ally of Donald Trump, said his government was going "line by line" through organisations operating in Hungary that have received financial assistance from the United States. *—PTI*

H-1B visa registration for FY 2026 opens on 7 March

NEW YORK, 7 FEB

The registration period for H-1B visas, favoured by Indian IT professionals, will open on 7 March and close on 24 March, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services announced. This non-immigrant visa allows US firms to employ foreign workers in specialised fields. The the process will have a beneficiary-centric approach, ensuring every individual gets equal chance. *—PTI*

US for major job cuts in USAID worldwide

WASHINGTON, 7 FEB

The Trump administration presented a plan on Thursday to dramatically cut staffing worldwide for US aid projects as part of its dismantling of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), leaving fewer than 300 workers out of thousands.

On Thursday, federal workers' associations filed a suit asking a federal court to stop the shutdown, arguing that President Donald Trump lacks the authority to shut down an agency enshrined in Congressional legislation.

Two current USAID employees and one former senior USAID official told The Associated Press of the administration's plan, presented to remaining senior officials of the agency on Thursday.

The plan would leave fewer than 300 staffers on the job out of what are currently 8,000. *—PTI*

Khamenei not keen on negotiations with US

DUBAI, 7 FEB

Iran's leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Friday said negotiations with America "are not intelligent, wise or honourable" after President Donald Trump floated nuclear talks with Tehran. He also suggested that "there should be no negotiations with such a government," but stopped short of issuing a direct order not to engage with Washington.

For months before and after the US election, Iranian officials appeared to be signalling that they are waiting for a message from Trump on whether he wants to negotiate over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear programme.

At stake are potentially billions of dollars withheld from Iran through sanctions. *—PTI*

Ukraine gets French jets from Netherlands

KYIV, 7 FEB

A first delivery of French Mirage fighter planes has arrived in Ukraine, according to President Zelenskyy. Elsewhere, Russia claims to have repelled a Ukrainian offensive in Kursk.

The Ukrainian Air Force has taken receipt of a batch of French Mirage 2000-5 and F-16 multi-role fighter planes from the Netherlands, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy confirmed on Thursday.

"Ukraine's air fleet continues to develop," wrote Zelenskyy on social media.

"The first Mirage 2000 jets from France have arrived, adding to our air defence capabilities. I thank (French President) Emmanuel Macron for his leadership and support. France's president keeps his word, and we appreciate it. This is another step in strengthening Ukraine's security."

French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu also confirmed the delivery of the Mirage fighters, saying, "Manned by Ukrainian pilots who have trained in France for several months, they will now participate in the defence of Ukraine's skies."

Ukrainian Defence Minister Rustem Umerov on Thursday said the Netherlands had delivered additional US-made F-16 fighter planes which he said "will soon begin carrying out combat missions, strengthening our defence" along with the French Mirage jets.

"With the latest deliveries, we are also continuing to expand our F-16 fleet, with the Netherlands fulfilling its commitments to support this effort," said Zelenskyy.

Several European countries have pledged some of their American-made F-16s to Ukraine, including Norway, an initiative which is even more important to Kyiv given fears of decreasing support from Washington since US President Donald Trump's inauguration. *—DW NEWS*

PHOTO: X

Vandalism, arson spread as B'desh protests continue

DHAKA, 7 FEB

A fire was ignited at the residence of Awami League Presidium Member Sheikh Selim in Banani, Dhaka, around 1.30am on Friday. The Fire Service faced significant delays in responding due to security concerns, reaching the site only at 2.45am.

Witnesses reported that unruly crowds were responsible for the blaze at Selim's home. The Fire Service control room duty officer indicated that the hazardous conditions prevented their vehicles from accessing the area promptly.

This incident follows a similar attack on Wednesday night, when students and protestors vandalised and set fire to the historic residence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Dhanmondi-32, with a bulldozer demolishing much of the building. Acts of vandalism and arson have also been reported targeting the homes and offices of various Awami League leaders across the nation.

In Rajshahi, a group of protesters set the three-storey house of Shahriar Alam, former state minister for foreign affairs, in Chaksinga Mohalla on fire, UNB reported. Witnesses said over 100 people from Bagha and Charghat upazilas went there on motorbikes and set the house on fire around noon.

In response to the escalating violence, the interim government issued a statement on Thursday evening, warning that any attempts to destabilise the country through vandalism and arson would result in immediate law enforcement action. The government reassured citizens of its commitment to safeguarding lives and property, pledging to hold those responsible for these attacks accountable.

Protesters also attacked the house of AL leader Abu Sayeed in the Shalgaria village of Pabna yesterday. They broke the gate, ransacked the house, and then set it on fire on Thursday evening, said witnesses. *—Dhaka Tribune*

People gather at the demolished house of Bangladesh's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Dhaka PHOTO: PTI

Israel strikes Hezbollah's weapons stash

JERUSALEM, 7 FEB

Israeli military said late Thursday that its forces had struck two sites that allegedly contained weapons belonging to the Hezbollah group, a Hamas ally, that were in "violation" of a ceasefire agreement.

Israel's forces "conducted a precise strike in Lebanese territory on two military sites that contained Hezbollah weapons, which were in violation of the ceasefire agreement," the Israeli army said in a statement on social media platform X.

Previously sporadic fighting between Israel and Hezbollah escalated on 8 October, 2023, following Hamas' unprecedented attack on Israel.

Israel and Hezbollah agreed to a truce in November 2024, after 13 months of conflict between Israeli forces and the Iranian-backed Lebanese armed group.

The agreement required Hezbollah to withdraw from north of Lebanon's Litani River while Israel was to gradually pull back south of the Blue Line into Israel within 60 days.

Both sides have accused each other of violations of the agreement. The White House said last month that the truce had been extended until February 18, 2025. *—DW News*

6,000 TREMORS SINCE 26 JAN

State of emergency in quake-hit Santorini

ATHENS, 7 FEB

Authorities in Greece on Thursday moved to declare a state of emergency on the island of Santorini as persistent tremors continued hiking fears of a possible bigger earthquake.

The region has been rattled by thousands of tremors and more than a hundred earthquakes since 26 January.

The Greek Civil Protection Ministry issued the declaration that allows authorities to quickly mobilise heavy equipment and emergency personnel. It said the declaration would be in force until 3 March.

Government spokesman Pavlos Marinakis on Thursday said Greece's "entire state mechanism has been mobilised" to prepare for "any eventuality."

The exodus from Santorini over the weekend saw 5,000 people flee the island as earthquakes continue PHOTO: X

More than 11,000 people have fled Santorini by ferry and by airplane, with travel operators adding extra journeys to both forms of transport.

German news agency DPA reported that around two-thirds of the island's inhabitants had left and that it was unclear how many tourists remained in the popular holiday hotspot.

Greece's authority on earthquakes, the Athens Geodynamic Institute, said that to date there have been 110 earthquakes measuring between 4.0 and 4.9 in magnitude.

The strongest earthquake so far was one measuring 5.2, recorded on Wednesday evening.

The institute said that over 6,000 tremors had been recorded in the Aegean Sea near the islands of Santorini, Amorgos, Anafi and Ios since 26 January.

Experts say the current seismic activity is unprecedented and they cannot say with certainty when the situation will normalise.

"The most likely scenario is for the seismic activity to continue for certain days or weeks at the same intensity," the AFP news agency quoted the head of Greece's earthquake planning and protection authority, Efthymios Lekkas, as telling Proto Programma radio. *—DW News*

Philippine VP prepares for impeachment battle

MANILA, 7 FEB

Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte on Friday said her lawyers were preparing for a legal battle in her upcoming impeachment trial but did not say if resignation was an option so she could pre-empt a possible conviction that would bar her from running for president in the future.

Sara Duterte PHOTO: X

Duterte was speaking for the first time since the House of Representatives impeached her on Wednesday on a raft of criminal charges, including plotting to have President Ferdinand Marcos Jr assassinated, which she again denied.

At the news conference, she underscored economic hardships and said the lives of Filipinos have become "much worse" due to skyrocketing costs of living.

"God save the Philippines," Duterte said and asked her supporters to turn to social media to express their sentiments instead of holding street protests to avoid disrupting their lives.

The impeachment complaint focused on the alleged threats to Marcos, irregularities in the use of office funds and Duterte's failure to stand up to Chinese aggression in the disputed South China Sea, according to proponents of the petition. *—PTI*

Exchange rate policy consistent: RBI Guv

RBI says it doesn't target any 'specific level' of rupee; Banks to use 'bank.in' domain

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Friday said the exchange rate policy has remained consistent over the years and the central bank does not target any "specific level or band" of the rupee, which slipped to an all-time low of 87.59 to a US dollar.

On Thursday, the rupee plunged 16 paise to close at a record low of 87.59 against the American currency.

"I would like to mention here that the Reserve Bank's exchange rate policy has remained consistent over the years. Our stated objective is to maintain orderliness and stability, without compromising market efficiency," he said while unveiling the outcome of the Monetary Policy Committee meeting.

"Our interventions in the forex market focus on smoothening excessive and disruptive volatility rather than targeting any specific exchange rate level or band. The exchange rate of the Indian rupee is determined by market forces," he said.

Meanwhile, India's forex reserves rose USD 1.05 billion to USD 630.607 billion for the week ended 31 January, the RBI said on Friday.

Exclusive domain name

Meanwhile, the Reserve Bank on Friday decided that Indian banks will have exclusive internet domain name "bank.in" and non-bank financial entities "fin.in". Malhotra said registrations for "bank.in" will commence from April 2025, and going forward "fin.in" will be introduced. The decision is aimed at enhancing trust in the financial sector, he said adding the increased instances of fraud in digital payments are a significant concern.

The initiative aims to reduce cyber security threats and malicious activities like phishing, and streamline secure financial services, thereby enhancing trust in digital banking and payment services.

RBI said the global economic backdrop remains challenging but the Indian economy continue to remain strong, resilient. CAD expected to remain well within sustainable level.

Next meeting of Monetary Policy Committee scheduled for 7-9 April. —*PTI*

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra with Deputy Governors M Rajeshwar Rao, Swaminathan Janakiraman and T Rabi Sankar at a press conference on Monetary Policy Statement, in Mumbai, on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Repo rate cut to boost economy: Experts

KOLKATA, 7 FEB

The repo rate cut by 25 basis points by the RBI's monetary policy committee (MPC) announced on Friday will give a long-awaited relief on interest rates and also be supportive of economic growth, according to experts.

The repo rate has been cut by 25 basis points, which now stands at 6.25 per cent. It is the interest rate at which the RBI lends money to commercial banks.

Chief economist of Crisil Limited Dharmakirti Joshi said the repo rate cut was expected. He said that the recent easing in consumer price index inflation and the need to remain supportive of economic growth has moved the RBI to act in this regard.

"Elevated rates have impacted India's GDP growth. The budget for the next financial year is mildly supportive of growth, while continuing on the path of fiscal consolidation," he said. Chief Investment Officer of Axis Securities PMS Naveen Kulkarni also echoed Joshi. "GDP growth for the current fiscal has been revised downwards to 6.4 per cent from 6.6 per cent, Kulkarni said. "For the next fiscal, the GDP is expected to be at 6.7 per cent. We could see another rate cut of 25 basis points," he said. "And for the next fiscal, the GDP is expected to be at 6.7 per cent," he said. —*PTI*

RBI allows 156 vostro accounts for rupee trade

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The government on Friday said so far the RBI has permitted 123 correspondent banks from 30 trading partner countries to open 156 Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVAs) with 26 banks in India to promote bilateral trade in local currencies.

The RBI has also entered into arrangements with select trade partner countries like the UAE, Indonesia and Maldives for encouraging settlement of cross-border trade in rupee and the local bank of the partner country, minister Jitin Prasada told the Rajya Sabha.

"As on date, RBI has permitted 123 Correspondent banks from 30 trading partner countries for opening of total 156 SRVAs with 26 AD (authorised deal) banks in India," he said. The government in consultation with the RBI, has taken several steps towards increasing the availability and acceptability of the domestic currency and use of other local currencies for cross-border transactions. —*PTI*

Gold trades flat at Rs 86,070 per 10 after all-time high

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Gold remained flat at its all-time high price of Rs 86,070 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. On Thursday, gold of 99.9 per cent purity continued its record-setting trend for the sixth straight session, climbing Rs 270 to hit a new lifetime high of Rs 86,070 per 10 grams. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity traded flat at Rs 85,670 per 10 grams on Friday. Silver prices also ruled flat at Rs 96,500 per kg for the second straight session. The precious metal, however, rose in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX). The April contract of gold jumped Rs 249 to Rs 84,693 per 10 grams on the MCX, to trade near its record high. —*PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

India achieved 100GW solar milestone: Minister

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

India has officially reached a significant milestone of 100GW in solar energy capacity, as announced by Union Minister Pralhad Joshi on Friday. He highlighted the ambition to attain a total of 500GW in renewable energy capacity by 2030. Joshi attributed this achievement to the "visionary leadership" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the country's commitment to a sustainable future.

India initially aimed for 175GW of renewable energy capacity, including 100GW of solar by 2022; however, the target was not met due to the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Notably, India added just 2.82GW of solar capacity from 2004-2014 under the previous UPA government, contrasting sharply with the 100GW added since 2014. —*PTI*

JSW Grp to invest ₹1Lcr in M'rashtra mega steel plant

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

TechEagle announced plans to invest Rs 100 crore over the next three years, driven by soaring demand for drones and unmanned aerial vehicles in public safety sectors. Co-founded by Paytm's Vijay Shekhar Sharma, the company unveiled its autonomous UAV First Responder, aimed at enhancing disaster relief, law enforcement, crowd control, and environmental monitoring. "With expanded manufacturing and strategic partnerships, TechEagle is ready to meet the increasing demand from state agencies and international emergency teams," the firm declared. The First Responder Drone promises superior range, payload capacity, and autonomy at a fraction of the cost of its Western rivals. —*PTI*

Mkt settle lower after RBI policy

PHOTO: PTI

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Friday as the RBI's rate cut did not spring any major surprise for the markets and investors turned to profit-taking amid foreign fund outflows.

Registering its third day of decline, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dropped 197.97 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 77,860.19, in a volatile trade. During the day, it lost 582.42 points or 0.74 per cent to 77,475.74.

The NSE Nifty declined 43.40 points or 0.18 per cent to 23,559.95.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, the stock of ITC dipped over 2 per cent after the diversified entity reported a 7.27 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 5,013.16 crore for the December quarter on account of subdued demand and sharp escalation in input costs.

State Bank of India, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services, ICICI Bank, Reliance Industries and PowerGrid were also among the laggards.

"As the rate cut did not spring any major surprise, investors did not find anything interesting in the new RBI governor's comments which resulted in a steady bout of profit-taking in banking, oil & gas, FMCG and power stocks. The ongoing earnings have been mixed to subdued while relentless selling of domestic shares by the FIIs have prompted investors to maintain caution," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Among the gainers, Tata Steel jumped over 4 per cent.

Bharti Airtel's stock surged nearly 4 per cent after the firm reported a more than five-fold jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 16,134.6 crore boosted by consolidation of the Indus Tower business and benefits of tariff hikes flowing into the quarter.

Zomato, Mahindra & Mahindra, UltraTech Cement and Tech Mahindra were also the other gainers. —*PTI*

INFOSYS SACKS 700 FRESHERS FOR NOT CLEARING 'INTERNAL ASSESSMENT'

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

Infosys has laid off over 700 freshers who underwent foundational training at its Mysuru campus but could not clear internal assessments after three attempts, according to sources.

IT employee union NITES, however, said the number of freshers affected by the move was much higher, and threatened to lodge an official complaint with the Ministry of Labour and Employment, seeking urgent intervention and strict action against the company.

In response to an email query, the Bengaluru-headquartered IT services company said, "At Infosys, we have a rigorous hiring process where all freshers, after undergoing extensive foundational training at our Mysuru campus, are expected to clear internal assessments." All freshers get three attempts to clear the assessment, failing which they will not be able to continue with the organisation, the company said, asserting that this clause "is also mentioned in their contract".

"This process has been in existence for over two decades and ensures a high quality of talent availability for our clients," Infosys said.

Sources privy to the development said the number of affected freshers is just above 300. —*PTI*

AFTER ALL-TIME LOW

Rupee recovers by 26 paise amid RBI rate cut

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

The Indian rupee appreciated by 26 paise to 87.33 against the US dollar on Friday after hitting an all-time low of 87.59 in the previous session. It was later trading at 87.45 against the greenback as markets responded to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) decision to reduce the repo rate by 25 basis points.

Opening at 87.57 in the inter-bank foreign exchange market, the rupee reached an intraday high of 87.33 and a low of 87.57. Traders noted that the anticipated rate cut by the RBI, under newly appointed Governor Sanjay Malhotra, led to a muted market reaction.

The cut, the first in nearly five years, follows Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement of significant tax breaks for the middle class in the recent budget to stimulate economic consumption amid slow growth. Governor Malhotra emphasised that the RBI's exchange rate policy aims to maintain stability without targeting a specific rupee level. Although the lower rate could enhance liquidity and attract foreign investments, it may also increase rupee supply and heighten depreciation pressures, according to forex traders.

As of 31 January, India's foreign exchange reserves stood at USD 630.6 billion. —*PTI*

The cut first in five years, follows the announcement of tax breaks for the middle class in the recent Union Budget

Ratan Tata leaves Rs 500 crore to close associate

MUMBAI, 7 FEB

Ratan Tata left one-third of his estate to Mohini Mohan Dutta. The estimated value of the residual estate is around Rs 500 crore.

Dutta, aged 74, is an entrepreneur in the travel industry who hails from Jamshedpur. His family owned Stallion, a travel agency before it merged with Taj Services, which is owned by the Tata Group, in 2013. Dutta's family reportedly owned 80 per cent of the shares in the company prior to the merger while Tata Industries held the remaining 20 per cent.

The two reportedly met in the 60s in the Dealer's Hotel in Jamshedpur, beginning a six-decade long association. Dutta's daughter also worked with the Tata conglomerate, first at the Taj Hotels until 2015 and then at Tata Trusts where she until 2024.

—*Agencies*

REPLACES SIX-DECADE OLD ACT

New IT bill is all set to simplify tax law

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The forthcoming Income Tax Bill, designed to replace the outdated Income Tax Act of 1961, promises to simplify direct tax laws, eliminate ambiguities, and reduce litigation, according to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The Bill is expected to be presented in Parliament during the Budget session and will later undergo scrutiny by the Standing Committee on Finance.

Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey has noted that the new legislation will feature straightforward language without complex provisos or lengthy sentences, maintaining tax neutrality.

Q. Why is a review of the I-T Act necessary?

A. The Income Tax Act was enacted around 60 years ago, during a very different socio-economic landscape. Since then, significant changes in how individuals earn income and businesses operate have occurred, necessitating an overhaul of an increasingly cumbersome and complex law. The Act, burdened by numerous amendments, has become difficult for the average person to understand due to its intricate references to various sections.

Q. What did the Finance Minister announce?

A. Minister Sitharaman announced a comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act within six months during her Budget speech on 23 July, 2024. She emphasised the need for a concise, comprehensible Act that reduces disputes and litigations, enhancing tax certainty for citizens. She later confirmed the introduction of the Bill in the ongoing Budget session on 1 February, 2025.

PHOTO: ANI

Q. What does the new Income Tax Act propose?

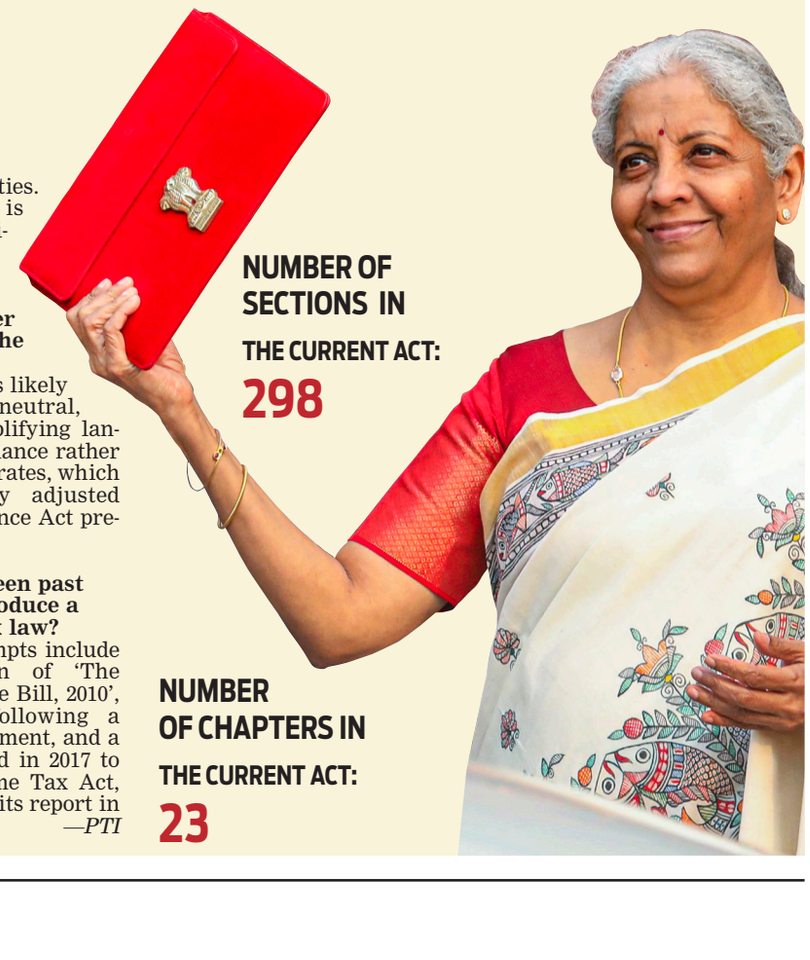
A. The new law aims to be more user-friendly, reducing its volume significantly and simplifying the language so taxpayers can easily determine their liabilities. This change is expected to minimise litigation.

Q. Will it result in a higher tax burden for the common man?

A. The exercise is likely to be revenue neutral, focusing on simplifying language and compliance rather than altering tax rates, which are traditionally adjusted through the Finance Act presented annually.

Q. Have there been past attempts to introduce a new Income Tax law?

A. Previous attempts include the introduction of 'The Direct Taxes Code Bill, 2010', which lapsed following a change in government, and a committee formed in 2017 to redraft the Income Tax Act, which submitted its report in August 2019. —*PTI*



NUMBER OF SECTIONS IN THE CURRENT ACT: 298

NUMBER OF CHAPTERS IN THE CURRENT ACT: 23

Sharma, Ahlawat struggle in Qatar Masters golf

DOHA, 7 FEB

The Indian duo of Shubhankar Sharma and Veer Ahlawat was off to a nightmarish start at the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters as the two golfers returned over-par cards dotted with several bogeys here. The Indians struggled at the Doha Golf Club course as Sharma shot three-over 75 in the opening round and was way down at tied 104th, while Ahlawat, playing in his rookie season, carded eight-over 80 and was tied 137th. They have a difficult task ahead of them to make the cut, which looks likely at even par. Rasmus Neergaard-Petersen and Brandon Robinson Thompson shared the first-round lead after carding six-under 66 rounds. Sharma had four birdies, five bogeys, and a double in his 75, while Ahlawat had just one birdie against five bogeys and two doubles. Thompson finds himself at the top of the leaderboard.—*PTI*

Churchill Brothers ease past Gokulam Kerala 2-1

RAIA, 7 FEB

Churchill Brothers returned to the top of the I-League 2024-25 table with a clinical 2-1 win over Gokulam Kerala FC here on Friday. For Churchill, Lalremruata Ralte and Kingslee Fernandes found the target as the home side now leads the chart with 26 points from 13 matches. They are two points ahead of Namdhari FC, who will face Shillong Lajong FC on Saturday. For Gokulam Kerala, M Soosairaj reduced the margin in the added time of the match. The match was a testament to the Churchill Brothers' relentless attack and strategic play, which has seen them notch eight wins in this campaign so far. Gokulam Kerala, who are in sixth with 19 points, suffered their second consecutive loss.From the outset, Churchill imposed their game plan effectively, utilizing high pressing and quick passing to disrupt Gokulam Kerala's setup.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Slow start for Aditi Ashok at Founders Cup

BRADENTON, 7 FEB

Aditi Ashok made a slow start to her season as the Indian shot a disappointing 1-over 72 in the first round of Founders Cup, the opening event of the year on the LPGA Tour. Aditi teed off from the tenth and was 1-under at the turn and added another birdie on the first to 2-under.She hit a rough patch with a bogey-bogey-par-double bogey stretch. A birdie on the eighth, her 17th hole was a small compensation.She found 10 of the 14 fairways and 13 of the 18 greens in regulation, but her putting let her down with 30 putts needed for the round.—*PTI*

Akshay shines at WM Phoenix Open Day One

SYDNEY, 7 FEB

Indian-American golfer Akshay Bhatia showcased his talent during the first day of the WM Phoenix Open by recording a commendable 5-under 66. This stellar play has positioned him in a tie for fourth place, just two shots behind tournament leader Wyndham Clark, who carded a remarkable 7-under 64. The day's competition saw Taylor Moore and Lee Hodges also achieve scores of 65, joining Bhatia among the leaders. Other notable golfers, including Justin Thomas, Nicolai Hojgaard, and Andrew Putnam, finished with 66 in near-perfect weather conditions, starkly contrasting to last year's soggy tournament start at TPC Scottsdale.—*PTI*

Lovlina, Ankushita clinch gold; Shiva, Abhinav win silver

Karnataka men lose to TN in Tennis; settle for silver

38TH NATIONAL GAMES

DEHRADUN, 7 FEB

Assam got a major boost at the 38th National Games, which is currently ongoing in Uttarakhand, as four of its boxers delivered stellar performances, bringing home two gold and two silver medals.

Olympic bronze medalist Lovlina Borgohain and Junior World Champion Ankushita Boro showcased their dominance in the ring, securing gold medals in their respective weight categories. Meanwhile, Olympian Shiva Thapa and rising star Abhinav Saikia put up strong fights but had to settle for silver.

Lovlina, competing in the Middleweight (75 kg) category, decimated Chandigarh's Pranshu Rathore 5-0 in the final to bag the gold. On the other hand, Ankushita Boro, who is competing in the women's welterweight (66 kg) division, outclassed homegirl Kajal by an identical scoreline to bag the second gold for Assam. With this victory, Ankushita set a new record, having reached the finals and won gold in three consecutive National Games, including the 2022 Gujarat and 2023 Goa editions.

Lovlina, Ankushita Clinches Gold PHOTO: X

Tamil Nadu ended Karnataka's reign at the top with a 2-0 win in the men's team gold medal match of the tennis event at the 38th National Games in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, on Friday.

Abhinav Shanmugam put Tamil Nadu ahead with a hard-fought 3-6, 7-6 (8-6), 6-4 win over Rishi Reddy in the first rubber. Like in their semifinal the previous day, it appeared S D Prajwal Dev, Karnataka's No. 1 player, would make it all square with a fine start.

The 28-year-old Mysurean clinched the opening set against Manish Sureshkumar to raise visions of a Karnataka comeback. However, after winning the set 7-5, Prajwal, who played a stellar role in the semifinal win over Services, allowed his rival a look-in.

Results: Men: Gold medal match: Tamil Nadu bt Karnataka 2-0 (Abhinav Shanmugam bt Rishi Reddy 3-6, 7-6 (8-6), 6-4; Manish Sureshkumar bt SD Prajwal Dev 5-7, 6-4, 6-4).

Mizoram, Odisha register easy wins in women hockey

Odisha and Mizoram registered convincing 4-1 and 4-0 wins over Karnataka and Uttarakhand respectively in the women's hockey competition at the 38th National Games on Friday.Odisha got the better of Karnataka in a Pool A match through goals from captain Jiwan Kishori Toppo (7th, 19th minutes), Rashmita Minz (39th), and Ekka Prathiba (42nd) in Haridwar. Anjali H R (55th) was the lone goalscorer for Karnataka. —*PTI*

WILL BE BACK FOR 2ND ODI

Kohli's knee swelling is not serious: Gill

CUTTACK, 7 FEB

India vice-captain Shubman Gill has allayed fears around Virat Kohli's fitness, saying the batting stalwart is fine and should be fit for the second One-Day International against England here on Sunday.

Kohli, 36, was forced to miss the ODI series opener in Nagpur due to swelling in his right knee, leaving the team in a spot of bother as it went into the final dress rehearsal for the ICC Champions Trophy, beginning in Pakistan and Dubai on 19 February.

Gill, who scored a clinical 87 in India's four-wicket victory against England in Nagpur, told Disney-Hotstar: "It's nothing serious. He was fine during yesterday's practice, but he woke up with some swelling in his knee this morning.

He'll be back for the second ODI." The top-order batter said he did not get carried away while approaching his century, adding that he would have played the shot, which ultimately got him, even if he was in his 60s.

Jos Buttler took a diving catch at mid-on off Saqib Mahmood's bowling as Gill, trying to pace the innings, mistimed a shot to leave India at 235/6. —*PTI*

PONTING QUESTIONS IYER'S ROLE IN INDIA'S WHITE-BALL SETUP

CUTTACK, 7 FEB

Australian legend Ricky Ponting finds it incredulous that Shreyas Iyer has not been given a permanent slot in India's white-ball side, given his magnificent form and the ability to dominate spinners on slow subcontinental pitches.

Iyer was one of the vital cogs in India's run to the final of the 50-over World Cup in 2023, with the middle-order batter scoring 530 runs to emerge the seventh-highest run-getter in the global event, and he further validated his prowess in the format with a 36-ball 59 against England in the first ODI at Nagpur on Thursday.

In domestic cricket too, the 30-year-old has been in fine fettle this season, scoring two centuries for Mumbai in the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

"I've been a little bit surprised that he's been out of India's side in the last couple of years. He had a terrific World Cup back in India (2023) where he played beautifully in the middle-order and I felt then that he'd almost cemented that spot and made that his own," opined Ponting on ICC Review. "Then he had those couple of injuries, obviously injured his back and went out of the side, but his domestic season this year has been brilliant. "It sort of coincided with what he's done since around (IPL) auction time going forward in domestic cricket —*PTI*

SL VS Australia: Smith and Carey dominate with 100s

NEW DELHI, 6 JUNE

Seemingly having a ball experimenting with the reverse sweep, Steven Smith's mastery in Asia continued and he combined with a dashing Alex Carey to defy a sharp-turning, deteriorating Galle surface as Australia grabbed firm control of the second Test.

The game was in the balance when Australia was 91 for 3 just after lunch on day two in reply to Sri Lanka's first-innings of 257. But stand-in skipper Smith and Carey produced an unbroken 239-run partnership to deflate a Sri Lankan team staring down the barrel of a hefty series defeat.

Carey was fluent from the get-go and motored past a tiring Smith by stumps as Australia built a sizeable first-innings lead on a very dry surface.

Smith reached his 36th Test century in style with a boundary in the final session on day two and raised his baggy green before nodding several times to his teammates in the terraces.

Australia 330 for 3 (Carey 139*, Smith 120*) lead Sri Lanka 257 (Kusal 85, Chandimal 74, Starc 3-37, Kuhnemann 3-63, Lyon 3-96) by 73 runs —*PTI*

ROTTERDAM OPEN

Carlos Alcaraz cruises, Stefanos Tsitsipas scrapes through QFs

PARIS, 7 FEB

Carlos Alcaraz eased into the quarter-finals of the Rotterdam Open on Thursday with a comfortable straight-sets win over Italian qualifier Andrea Vavassori. The top-seeded Alcaraz had far too much firepower and accuracy for Vavassori, ranked 317 in the world, running out a 6-2, 6-1 winner in just over an hour. "Today, I think I hit everything pretty well. I'm just hopeful I can keep going and be a bit better next round," said the Spaniard after the match. Wearing a breathing aid on his nose as he recovers from illness, Alcaraz got off to a flying start, breaking in the very first game and sealing the set 6-2 as the Italian pushed a forehand wide.

The Spaniard again broke early in the second set, taking the third game with a sumptuous lob. A second break followed quickly afterward as the Italian double-faulted.

Alcaraz wrapped up the match with another break of serve, sending a powerful forehand return to the feet of the Italian, who could only poke it wide.

"I had no ups and downs today which is good for me, something I'm working on," said Alcaraz.

Thursday's victory was a stark contrast to his first-round match when he required nearly three hours to dispatch local hero Botic van de Zandschulp.

"The first match of every tournament it's never easy to get used to the conditions, so I'm just trying to make the most of the time I spent here in the first round," he said.

Alcaraz will face Pedro Martinez for a place in the semi-finals after his compatriot stunned Danish fifth seed Holger Rune 6-4, 6-1.

Earlier Thursday, Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas saved a match point and battled from a set down to overcome local hope Tallon Griekspoor in a three-hour marathon.

The world number 12 eventually overcame spirited resistance from the Dutchman with a 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (8/6), 7-5 victory in a match lasting around three hours. —*PTI*

Sri Sathya Sai University: T20 match to foster unity

CHIKKABALLAPURA, 7 FEB

A star-studded exhibition T20 cricket match is set to take place this Saturday at the Sri Sathya Sai University Stadium in Muddenahalli, featuring cricket legends such as Yusuf Pathan, Irfan Pathan, Venkatesh Prasad, and Sri Lankan icons Muttaiah Muralitharan, Dilshan, and Di Silve.

Narasimha Murthy, Chancellor of Sri Sathya Sai University of Human Resources, announced that the match is themed "Health for All" and is titled the One World One Family Cup. The event aims to promote the message of living together harmoniously, reflecting the university's principle of "Vasudaiva Kutumbakam," inscribed on the trophy.

Indian cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar is playing a crucial role in organising the event, with arrangements in place for nearly 10,000 spectators. Additionally, the occasion will honour veteran cricketer GR Vishwanath.

In a bid to nurture emerging talent, Narasimha Murthy revealed plans for establishing a Cricket Academy to cater to budding players from Kolar and Chikkaballapura districts, with provisions for children from other areas to join. The academy aims to provide exceptional coaching free of charge, with experienced cricket experts guiding the young talents.

—*Salar News*

Liverpool routs Tottenham 4-0

LONDON, 7 FEB

Liverpool will play Newcastle in the English League Cup final after routing Tottenham 4-0 on Thursday.

A rampant performance overturned Spurs' 1-0 lead from the first leg of the semifinal and sealed a 4-1 aggregate victory that keeps Arne Slot's team in contention for an unprecedented quadruple of trophies in his first season in charge.

"We are in one final, but we have a lot to play for still," said Liverpool forward Cody Gakpo, who opened the scoring in the first half at Anfield. "We have to stay calm and focus to reach as much as possible." Mohamed Salah, Dominik Szoboszlai, and Virgil van Dijk all struck after the break in a one-sided semi-final second leg.

Liverpool will play Newcastle in the English League Cup final after routing Tottenham 4-0 PHOTO: @LFC

Liverpool will play Newcastle in the final at Wembley Stadium on March 16 for the chance to retain the trophy it won last year.

It could be just the first title in what is shaping up to be a special debut season for Slot after succeeding Jurgen Klopp last year. His team is top of the Premier League, into the round of 16 in the Champions League, and also in the FA Cup. Such a humbling defeat for Tottenham, meanwhile, will likely lead to more speculation about the future of manager Ange Postecoglou, with his team languishing 14th in the league and having won just four of its last 13 games in all competitions.

For the first time under Postecoglou, Spurs failed to get a shot on target in a game, according to stats provider Opta. —*PTI*

SERIE A

Inter slump to 3-0 defeat at Fiorentina

FLORENCE, 7 FEB

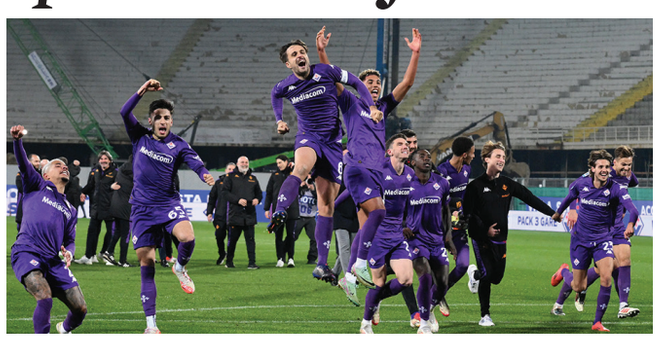
Defending champion Inter Milan missed the chance to move level at the top of the Serie A after a 3-0 loss to Fiorentina on Thursday.

Two goals from Moise Kean after Luca Ranieri's opener secured the win that lifted Fiorentina to fourth.

Inter remains second and three points behind leader Napoli after losing for just the second time in the league this season.

The match was rescheduled from December when midfielder Edoardo Bove collapsed on the field.

Two months after that harrowing incident, Bove was on the Fiorentina bench Thursday to support his teammates. The 22-year-old Bove had to have a heart defibrillator implanted.



Fiorentina players celebrate after the match PHOTO: @ACFFIORENTINAEN

Bove collapsed on the field in the 16th minute of the original meeting, in front of distraught fans and players, as medics rushed onto the field to treat him before he was taken to a hospital and put in a medically induced coma. —*PTI*

Sociedad reach SFs

Real Sociedad eliminated Osasuna for the second straight season in the Copa del Rey on Thursday, winning 2-0 to advance to the semifinals. Ander Barrenetxea and Brais Méndez scored first-half goals to give Sociedad the home victory against an Osasuna team that played a man down from the 35th when Alejandro Catena was sent off with a straight red card. —*PTI*

BCCI calls SGM on 1 March to appoint joint secretary

NEW DELHI, 7 FEB

The BCCI has convened a Special General Meeting (SGM) in Mumbai on 1 March to appoint a new joint secretary after the position was left vacant following the elevation of Devjit Saikia to the post of the board's secretary.

Assam Cricket Association's (ACA) Saikia succeeded Jay Shah in the secretary's position last month after the latter took over as the chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC) on December 1.

"Notice is hereby given for a Special General Meeting (hereinafter referred to as SGM) of the BCCI which will be held at noon IST on March 1, 2025, at BCCI headquarters in Mumbai, to transact the business of Election and Induction of the Joint Secretary of BCCI," the apex board said in a statement.

The names of former Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) president Avishek Dalmiya (East Zone), Delhi & District Cricket Association (DDCA) chief Rohan Jaitley (North Zone), and Mumbai Cricket Association's (MCA) Sanjay Naik (West Zone) are doing the rounds for the post. As it happened in the case of the BCCI secretary and treasurer, there won't be any election to pick the board's new joint secretary. —*PTI*